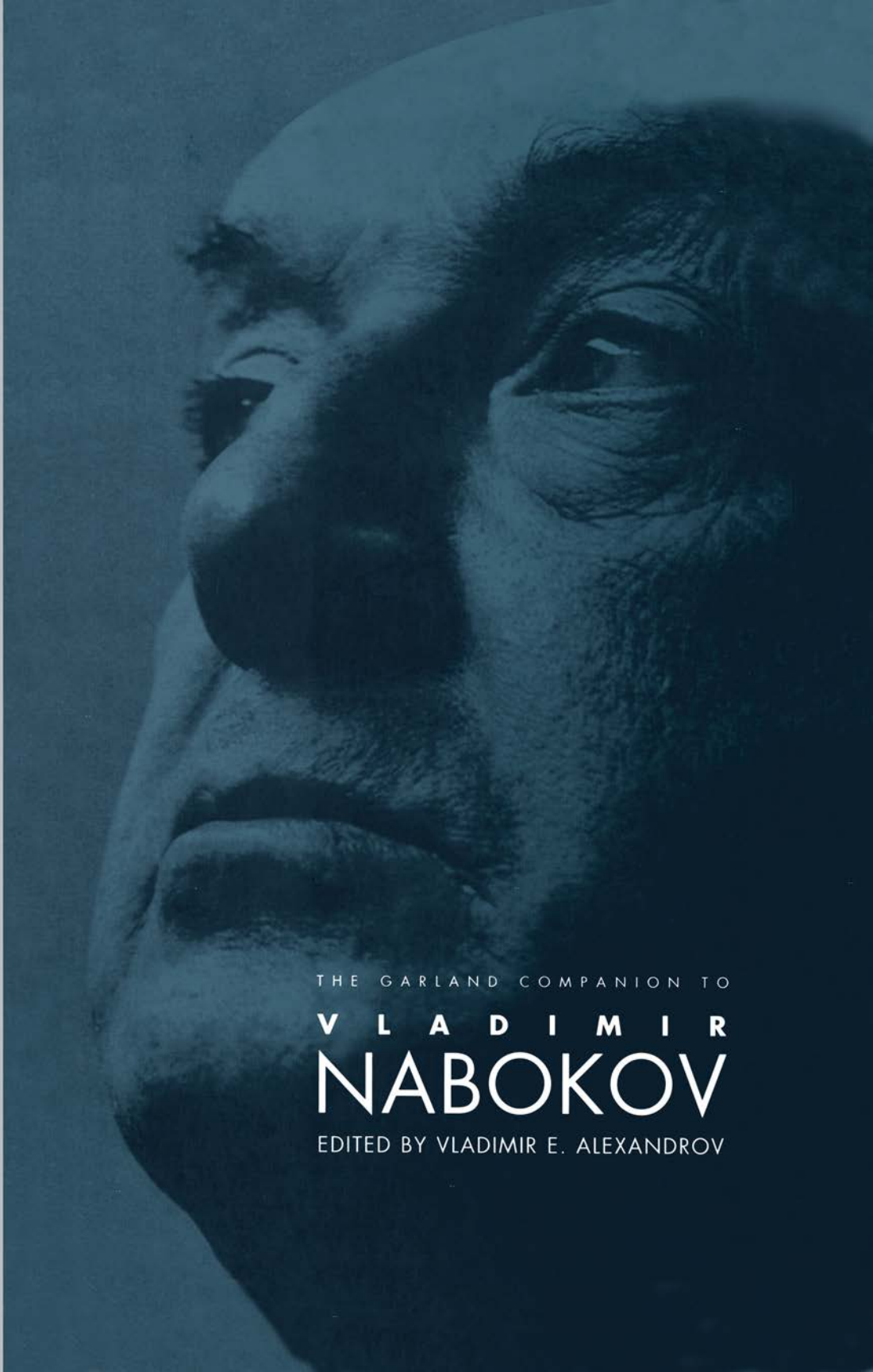

THE GARLAND COMPANION TO VLADIMIR NABOKOV

EDITED BY VLADIMIR E. ALEXANDROV

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Vladimir E. Alexandrov

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Gennady Barabtarlo, *Pnin*, from *Phantom of Fact: A Guide to Nabokov's* Pnin. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1989.

Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour, "Bilingualism," "Translation and Self-Translation," from *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the "First" Emigration*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Brian Boyd, "Chronology of Nabokov's Life and Works," "*Ada*," "Manuscripts." © 1994 Brian Boyd.

Annapaola Cancogni, "Nabokov and Chateaubriand," from "'My Sister do you still recall?': Chateaubriand/Nabokov." *Comparative Literature* 35, no. 2 (1983), 140–66.

Donald Fanger, "Nabokov and Gogol." © 1994 Donald Fanger.

Janet Gezari, "Chess and Chess Problems," from "Roman et problème chez Nabokov." *Poétique* 5, no. 8 (1974), 96–113; "Vladimir Nabokov and Chess." *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1987), 151–62; (with W. K. Wimsatt). "Vladimir Nabokov: More Chess Problems and the Novel." *Yale French Studies*, 58 (1979), 102–15.

D. Barton Johnson, "*The Eye*," "*Look at the Harlequins!*," from "The Books Reflected in Nabokov's *Eye*." *Slavic and East European Journal* 29,

no. 4 (Winter 1985), 393–404, © AATSEEL of the U.S., Inc.; "Eyeing Nabokov's *Eye*." *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1985), 328–50; *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1985.

Stephen Jan Parker, "Library," from "Nabokov in the Margins: The Montreux Books." *Journal of Modern Literature* 14, no. 1 (1987), 5–16.

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Jenefer Shute, "Nabokov and Freud," from "Nabokov and Freud: The Play of Power." *Modern Fiction Studies* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1984), 637–50, © Purdue Research Foundation, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907. Reprinted with permission.

G.S. Smith, "*Notes on Prosody*," from "Nabokov and Russian Verse Form." *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, no. 24 (1991), 271–305.

Leona Toker, "Nabokov and Bergson," from *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This volume was conceived as a kind of encyclopedia in which many of the world's recognized experts on Vladimir Nabokov, as well as specialists on other topics who could view him from a fresh or usefully provocative perspective, would provide concise analyses of his varied and extensive legacy. Although the genre of "editor's introduction" often dictates some attempt to justify the appearance of the book to which it is attached, no such gesture will be found here. For one thing, the present volume is unique in the combination of its scope, which includes virtually everything that Nabokov published, and the variety of viewpoints it contains. For another, Nabokov remains a perennial favorite of readers both in the so-called real world and in academe, and informed discussions of his work are a natural outgrowth of this interest, which has shown no sign of abating since his death in 1977. Indeed, if we consider the recent explosion of interest in Nabokov in the country of his birth, now again called Russia, then the numbers of his readers worldwide has increased manyfold.

This *Companion*'s targeted audience is intentionally broad—from the intrigued fan of *Lolita* who may want to orient herself in Nabokov's other works, to the beginning student who feels he needs guidance with respect to how to approach Nabokov, to seasoned scholars who have written extensively about him, or about literature in general. It is assumed that most readers of this volume will not know Russian, the language in which Nabokov wrote during the first part of his life. Most of the articles in the volume focus on individual titles from Nabokov's canon, or on the genres in which he worked. The series of articles entitled "Nabokov and . . ." constitutes a frequently unprecedented attempt to explore some of his most striking affinities and antipathies. The list of names that replace the ellipses

could of course be expanded, and in many instances the articles might perhaps be best seen as vectors pointing in directions that would be fruitful for other students to follow. The volume also includes a detailed chronology of Nabokov's life and works, bibliographies of primary and secondary works, an index that should make it easy to retrieve information about any aspect of his legacy.

Nabokov once remarked that you could not give someone even the time of day without revealing something about yourself in the process. Although it was not my intention to lay a heavy hand upon the *Companion,* Nabokov's truism is undoubtedly and inevitably reflected in this volume on one level—the topics of the articles, and the individuals who were commissioned to write them. As far as the topics are concerned, I followed two abstract operating principles. The first was to have separate articles focus on all significant individual works, titles, or clusters of related writings (rather than, for example, on isolated even if famous details such as the term "nymphet," which in fact has no interesting meaning outside the novel in which it appears); and second, to have articles on topics and issues that I think are crucial for understanding Nabokov, but that, for various reasons, would not be sufficiently visible in the volume if they were relegated to passing references in analyses of individual works. Readers of the volume who are already familiar with Nabokov studies, and with literary scholarship in general, will recognize many of the contributors, most of whom were invited on the strength of their previous publications on Nabokov or other relevant topics. The absence of other names is due to a variety of familiar reasons that experienced readers will not find difficult to divine, even though some, I am certain, will find these impossible to accept or to forgive. Another generic complaint will of course be about the shapes and sizes of the pieces into which Nabokov's exceptionally rich legacy was sliced. In connection with this, I would like to stress that word counts should not always be construed as reflecting the relative importance of individual topics; in quite a few instances, authors persuaded me that lengths greater than those I had requested were justified because of the relative neglect of their topics in the criticism.

However, in regard to the content of the individual articles and the opinions expressed in them, the editor followed a *laissez-faire* policy, and allowed each author to treat the assigned subject in any way s/he saw fit, so long as this encompassed as much of the topic as possible. The only other request was that each contributor should give some attention to surveying earlier critical reactions to the given aspect of Nabokov's legacy so that the reader could be made aware of the range of debates that the work(s) in

question had engendered; but even here some authors wanted and received leeway. Although I could not possibly agree with all the different opinions expressed in the volume, I have nevertheless been its first great beneficiary because of the pleasure and profit I received from reading and rereading every article in it.

The *Companion* could not have come into existence without the combined efforts of its forty-two contributors from nine countries. It has been a long, complicated, and satisfying project, which, in addition to the other virtues it undoubtedly possesses, also constitutes an unprecedented tribute to the memory and achievements of Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov.

Vladimir E. Alexandrov

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NOTE ON REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

In the articles that follow, references to the editions and reprints of Vladimir Nabokov's better-known and more often-cited writings that are listed below will be given parenthetically according to the format: abbreviation of the title, followed by page numbers, e.g.: (*Ada* 143–44).

Short references to all of Nabokov's other works will be given in the endnotes to individual articles, with *full* citations in the volume's Bibliography of Works by Vladimir Nabokov, which is a complete list of every work by Nabokov in the articles.

Short references to works by other authors will also be given in the endnotes to individual articles, with *full* bibliographic data in the Bibliography of Secondary Sources.

Ada *Ada, or Ardor: A Family Chronicle.* 1969; New York: Vintage International, 1990.

AnL *The Annotated Lolita.* Ed. with preface, introduction, and notes by Alfred Appel, Jr. 1970; revised and updated edition; New York: Vintage International, 1991.

BS *Bend Sinister.* 1947; New York: Vintage International, 1990.

Def *The Defense.* Trans. Michael Scammell in collaboration with the author. 1964; New York: Vintage International, 1990.

Des *Despair.* 1966; New York: Vintage International, 1989.

Eye *The Eye.* Trans. Dmitri Nabokov in collaboration with the author. 1965; New York: Vintage International, 1990.

IB *Invitation to a Beheading.* Trans. Dmitri Nabokov in collaboration with the author. 1959; New York: Vintage International, 1989.

Gift *The Gift.* Trans. Michael Scammell with the collaboration of the author. 1963; New York: Vintage International, 1991.

Glory *Glory.* Trans. Dmitri Nabokov in collaboration with the author. 1971; New York: Vintage International, 1991.

KQK *King, Queen, Knave.* Trans. Dmitri Nabokov in collaboration with the author. 1968; New York: Vintage International, 1989.

Laugh *Laughter in the Dark.* 1938; New York: Vintage International, 1989.

LATH *Look at the Harlequins!* 1974; New York: Vintage International, 1990.

LDQ *Lectures on* Don Quixote. Ed. Fredson Bowers. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark, 1983.

LL *Lectures on Literature.* Ed. Fredson Bowers. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark, 1980.

LRL *Lectures on Russian Literature.* Ed. Fredson Bowers. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark, 1981.

Lo *Lolita.* 1955; New York: Vintage International, 1989.

Mary *Mary.* Trans. Michael Glenny in collaboration with the author. 1970; New York: Vintage International, 1989.

NWL *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters, 1940–1971.* Ed., annotated and with an introductory essay by Simon Karlinsky. New York: Colophon, 1980 (corrected edition, same pagination as Harper and Row, 1979).

NG *Nikolai Gogol.* 1944; New York: New Directions, 1961.

PF *Pale Fire.* 1962; New York: Vintage International, 1989.

Pnin *Pnin.* 1957; New York: Vintage International, 1989.

PP *Poems and Problems.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970.

RLSK *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight.* 1941; New York: Vintage International, 1992.

SL *Selected Letters, 1940–1977.* Ed. Dmitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark Layman, 1989.

SM *Speak, Memory.* 1967; New York: Vintage International, 1989.

SO *Strong Opinions.* 1973; New York: Vintage International, 1990.

Stikhi *Stikhi.* Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1979.

TT *Transparent Things.* 1972; New York: Vintage International, 1989.

USSR *The Man from the U.S.S.R. and Other Plays.* Trans. and introductions by Dmitri Nabokov. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich/Bruccoli Clark, 1984.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The table below presents the simplified version of the Library of Congress system for transliterating Russian that is used throughout this volume. Exceptions are Nabokov's own transliterations of names and an occasional word when these are quotations from, or references to his works (e.g. Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, Nikolay Chernyshevski, "poshlust" rather than "poshlost'"); Russian names whose spellings have become more or less fixed in English (e.g., Gogol, Soloviev, Tolstoy); spellings canonized by others (e.g., Dmitri, Sikorski); and transliterations in critical studies.

А	а	A	a
Б	б	B	b
В	в	V	v
Г	г	G	g
Д	д	D	d
Е	е	E	e
Ё	ё	E	e
Ж	ж	Zh	zh
З	з	Z	z
И	и	I	i
Й	й	I	i
К	к	K	k
Л	л	L	l
М	м	M	m
Н	н	N	n
О	о	O	o
П	п	P	p
Р	р	R	r
С	с	S	s
Т	т	T	t
У	у	U	u
Ф	ф	F	f
Х	х	Kh	kh
Ц	ц	Ts	ts
Ч	ч	Ch	ch
Ш	ш	Sh	sh
Щ	щ	Shch	shch
	ъ		"
	ы		y
	ь		'
Э	э	E	e
Ю	ю	Iu	iu
Я	я	Ia	ia

The combinations of letters in Russian names "ый" and "ий"are rendered by "y."

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CHRONOLOGY OF NABOKOV'S LIFE AND WORKS

Dates before the Nabokov family's arrival in London in May 1919 are given in Old and New Style. Anniversaries of nineteenth-century Russian dates would start twelve days behind the New Style date, but become thirteen days behind in the twentieth century, as the Julian calendar slipped a further day behind the Gregorian. So Nabokov's father's birthday, July 8 in St. Petersburg in 1870, was July 20 in London, but in 1900 or 1919, would be July 21 in London; Nabokov's own birthday, April 10 in St. Petersburg in 1899 and April 22 in London, would be in London, in 1900 or 1920, April 23.

1870

July 8/20. Father, Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov, born, sixth child of statesman Dmitry Nikolaevich Nabokov (b. 1827) and Maria Ferdinandovna Nabokov (b. 1842, née Korff).

1876

August 17/29. Mother, Elena Ivanovna Rukavishnikov, born, third child of wealthy landowner Ivan Vasil'evich Rukavishnikov (b. 1841) and Olga Nikolaevna Rukavishnikov (b. 1845, née Kozlov).

1878

Grandfather, D.N. Nabokov, appointed Minister of Justice by Tsar Alexander II.

1881

Alexander II assassinated; son Tsar Alexander III retains D.N. Nabokov as Minister of Justice.

1885

Conservatives manage to force resignation of D.N. Nabokov.

1896

V.D. Nabokov appointed to faculty of the Imperial School of Jurisprudence.

1897

November 2/14. V.D. Nabokov marries Elena Rukavishnikov, daughter of his family's country neighbors.

1898

V.D. Nabokov joins the new liberal-opposition legal journal, *Pravo.*
Elena Nabokov gives birth to stillborn son.

1899

April 10/22. (see headnote) Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov, born at home, 47 Bol'shaia Morskaia, St. Petersburg.

1900

February 28/March 13. Brother Sergei born.

1901

March. Grandfather Ivan Rukavishnikov dies.
June. Grandmother Olga Rukavishnikov dies.
summer–fall. Family travels to Biarritz, France, then to Pau, where VN's uncle Vasily Rukavishnikov has a castle.
December 23/January 5, 1902. Véra Evseevna Slonim born.

1902

VN and Sergei learn English from first English governess, Miss Rachel Home.
December 24/January 5, 1903. Sister Olga born.

1903

April. V.D. Nabokov writes major article in *Pravo* denouncing government's official anti-Semitism as cause of Kishinev pogroms.
September–?December. Family travels to Paris and Nice, where Nabokov sees senile grandfather D.N. Nabokov.

1904

February. Russo-Japanese War begins.
April. Family travels for three weeks to Rome and Naples.
July. Minister of the Interior Count von Plehve assassinated.
September. Prince Sviatopolk-Mirsky appointed to replace him; new possibilities for change sensed in Russia.
fall. Family travels to Beaulieu, near Nice, where VN falls in love with Rumanian girl surnamed Ghika.
November 6–9/19–22. First national congress of zemstvos (elected local assemblies) held in St. Petersburg. Final session, held in Nabokov home at 47 Morskaia, calls for constitution, legislative assembly, and guaranteed civil rights, and effectively launches the "1905 (or First) Revolution."
November 14/27. V.D. Nabokov, told his political activities incompatible with post at the Imperial School of Jurisprudence, resigns.

1905

January 9/22. "Bloody Sunday". Tsar's troops fire at massive but peaceful demonstration, killing more than a hundred.

January. V.D. Nabokov denounces killings in St. Petersburg City Duma, of which he is member, and is stripped of his court title.

February. To avoid the disapproval his politics is causing among his family, V.D. Nabokov takes wife and children south to Abbazia to stay with sister Natalia de Peterson.

summer. VN in Abbazia feels first pangs of nostalgia for Vyra, the Nabokov summer home.

September. Iosif Hessen of *Pravo* writes to V.D. Nabokov that his place is not in an Italian resort but in St. Petersburg, where a leading role awaits him in the political revolution taking place. V.D. Nabokov returns to St. Petersburg at once.

October. General strike in Russia. V.D. Nabokov in Moscow for conference that sets up Constitutional Democratic (CD) Party. Nicholas II issues October Manifesto, promises legislative duma. V.D. Nabokov attacks manifesto in *Pravo* for not going far enough.

fall. Elena Nabokov and children travel from Abbazia to Wiesbaden, where VN and Sergei evade governess Miss Hunt, who is dismissed, and VN meets cousin Baron Iury Rausch von Traubenberg (Iurik).

winter. Elena Nabokov and children return to Russia, wintering out at Vyra to avoid turmoil in St. Petersburg.

1906

winter. Cécile Miauton arrives as French governess. VN soon fluent in French.

March. V.D. Nabokov elected as CD candidate for First State Duma.

March 18/31. Sister Elena born.

April 27/May 9. First State Duma opened.

May 2/15. V.D. Nabokov, as leading speaker of largest party in Duma, chosen to deliver Address to the Throne, which tries to turn the Duma into a constituent assembly. His parliamentary skills help ensure its unanimous passage.

May 13/26. Chief Minister Goremykin announces to Duma that administration rejects program signaled in Address to the Throne. V.D. Nabokov leaps up to speak first, and ends his speech. "Let the executive power submit to the legislative!"

summer. Shocked to discover that his sons can read and write in English but not Russian, V.D. Nabokov hires village schoolmaster, Vasily Zhernosekov, a Socialist Revolutionary, to teach them over summer.

VN begins to catch butterflies, which will remain a life-long passion.

July 9/22. Tsar unexpectedly dissolves Duma.

July 10/23. In Vyborg, Finland, V.D. Nabokov, along with other CDs in Duma, signs manifesto calling the country to resist conscription and taxes. Within a week signatories all stripped of political rights. V.D. Nabokov will not be able to stand for election again or to play direct part in politics until after February 1917 Revolution, and serves CD cause as journalist and as editor of the CD newspaper *Rech'*, St. Petersburg's leading liberal daily.

fall. Family returns to St. Petersburg to rented house at 38 Sergievskaia Street. Elena Nabokov is too distraught by killings of children in Mariinskaia Square to return to the nearby home at 47 Morskaia until fall 1908.

1907

January–February. VN has severe bout of pneumonia, loses capacity for mathematical calculation. Mother surrounds his bed with butterfly books, "and the longing to describe a new species completely replaced that of discovering a new prime number" (*SM* 123).

VN and Sergei graduate from governesses to the first of their Russian tutors, Ordyntsev.

August. Family travels to Biarritz. VN falls in love with Serbian girl called Zina.

October. Family returns.

New tutor, Pedenko, soon replaced by a Lett. The boys also have a Mr. Burness as an English tutor. VN, whom the family expects to become a painter, has Englishman Mr. Cummings as a drawing master.

December. V.D. Nabokov tried for signing Vyborg Manifesto.

1908

Boleslav Okolokulak becomes tutor.

May 14/27. After unsuccessful appeal, V.D. Nabokov enters Kresty prison for three-month sentence.

VN has now mastered the known butterflies of Europe.

August 12/25. V.D. Nabokov released from prison to triumphal reception at Rozhdestveno, the village near Vyra.

1909

fall. Family vacation at Biarritz. Falls in love with nine-year-old Claude Deprès (the "Colette" of *Speak, Memory*).

1910

Filip Zelensky ("Lensky" in *Speak, Memory*) becomes tutor. VN has impressionist Iaremich as drawing master. Translates Mayne Reid's *The Headless Horseman*, a Western, into French Alexandrines.

summer. Ventures further afield for butterflies, to bog called "America" because of remoteness. Rears caterpillars and has "dreamed his way through" Seitz's multivolume *Die Großschmetterlinge der Erde* (*Butterflies of the World*).

fall. Family travels to Bad Kissingen and Berlin. VN and Sergei stay three months in Berlin with Zelensky for orthodontic work. Falls in love with American woman, "Louise Poindexter," until he discovers she is dancing girl.

December. VN and Sergei return to St. Petersburg.

1911

January. VN and Sergei begin classes at elite but liberal Tenishev School, VN in the second class, at the start of the third "semester." Studies Russian, French, German.

June 17/30. Brother Kirill born.

summer. In love with Polenka, daughter of family's head coachman.

August. Family visits estate of V.D. Nabokov's sister in province of Podolsk, southwest Russia.

October 24/November 5. At school, sees mocking newspaper account of father's having called out editor of conservative newspaper *Novoe vremia* for insinuating he married for money. Terrified all day that father will be killed in duel, returns home to find that it will not after all take place.

1912

Has Mstislav Dobuzhinsky as drawing master for two years.

summer. While chasing *Parnassius mnemosyne* butterfly, catches sight of Polenka swimming naked.

1913

summer. Swiss tutor, Nussbaum, fills in for honeymooning Zelensky.

October. Grandmother Maria Nabokov has to sell off her estate, Batovo, which adjoins Vyra.

November. V.D. Nabokov attends the Beilis trial, Russia's Dreyfuss affair, and is fined for his reporting of the court proceedings.

1914

spring. School report characterizes VN. "zealous football-player, excellent worker, respected as comrade by both flanks (Rosov-Popov), always modest, serious and restrained (though not averse to a joke), Nabokov creates a most agreeable impression by his moral decency."

Zelensky quits as tutor. Final tutor Nikolai Sakharov lasts only over summer.

June. Iury Rausch visits Vyra, impresses VN with his sexual exploits.

July. Composes what he calls in *Speak, Memory* his "first poem" and from this point on becomes prey to "the numb fury of verse-making" (p. 215).

July 17/30. War declared, St. Petersburg's name changed to Petrograd.

July 21/August 3. V.D. Nabokov mobilized as ensign in the reserves.

fall. Has a poem duplicated and bound for distribution to friends and relatives.

1915

summer. In bed with typhus. On recovery, tries to drive family car and lands in ditch. First love affair, with Valentina ("Liussia") Shul'gina (the "Tamara" of *Speak, Memory* and the "Mary" of *Mary*).

September. V.D. Nabokov transferred from front to St. Petersburg.

November. Co-edits school journal, *Iunaia mysl'*, which contains poem "Osen'" ("Autumn"), his first publication. Misses school frequently to be with Liussia. Writes many love poems for her.

1916

January. Poet Vasily Gippius becomes VN's teacher of Russian literature. VN publishes translation of Musset's "La Nuit de décembre" in *Iunaia mysl'*, where his "Osen'" is singled out for particular praise in review of previous number.

February. V.D. Nabokov visits Britain as representative of Russian press.

spring. Father's librarian types out VN poem and sends to *Vestnik Evropy*, Russia's best literary review. Published in July issue.

June. Has *Stikhi* (*Poems*), sixty-seven passionate but uninspiring effusions, privately printed in Petersburg.

Mother's brother Vasily dies, leaving VN two-thousand-acre estate worth several million dollars.

fall. Discovering that his second summer with Liussia was no match for the first, realizes the affair is over by the time of his return to Petrograd and begins "the kind of varied experience which I thought an elegant *littérateur* should seek . . . an extravagant phase of sentiment and sensuality" (*SM* 240) that lasts until about the mid-1920s. By late 1916, having affairs with three married women, including his cousin Tatiana Segerkranz, Iury Rausch's sister.

1917

January. After another bout of pneumonia, sent with mother to recuperate at Imatra, Finland. Meets Eva Lubryjinska,[1] his next love.

February 27/March 12. February Revolution. Soldiers refuse to shoot demonstrators and begin to mutiny.

March 2/15. Nicholas II abdicates in favor of his brother.

March 3/16. V.D. Nabokov co-drafts letter of abdication for Grand Duke Mikhail Aleksandrovich, which ends Romanov dynasty.

March. V.D. Nabokov named Chancellor (minister without portfolio) in first Provisional Government.

May. Operated on for appendicitis. Composes poem "Dozhd' proletel" ("The Rain Has Flown"), the earliest to be included in his collected poems.

July 3/16. V.D. Nabokov resigns with other CDs from Provisional Government, and is elected to Constituent Assembly.

fall. Selects verse to be published with work of Tenishev schoolmate, Andrei Balashov, in volume *Dva puti* (*Two Paths*), which appears in 1918.

October 24–25/November 6–7. Bolshevik coup. V.D. Nabokov remains in Petrograd as president of the Electoral Commission for the Constituent Assembly, but after VN completes school-leaving exams early, V.D. Nabokov sends family to Crimea, his two oldest sons first to avoid conscription into the Red Army.

November 2/15. VN and Sergei leave Petrograd, reaching Crimea three days later. There they stay at Gaspra, the estate of CD leader Countess Panin, and are soon joined by Elena Nabokov and the other children.

November 23/December 6. V.D. Nabokov arrested by Bolsheviks and imprisoned. Released after six days, he escapes to Crimea, arriving December 3/16.

1918

January. Bolsheviks take Yalta area.

February 13/26. Receives letter from Liussia Shul'gina, now in Ukraine, and feels intense pangs of exile.

April 17/30. Germans take Yalta. V.D. Nabokov begins to write memoir *The Provisional Government.*

summer. Enjoys holiday atmosphere in Yalta, undertakes solo butterfly expedition onto Crimean plateau.

August. Meets poet Maksimilian Voloshin, who introduces him to Andrei Bely's system of metrical scansion, which preoccupies him as poet and prosodist for several months.

September. Family moves to Livadia, tsar's former residence outside Yalta. Learns some Latin.

November. Germans withdraw, and local CDs and Tatar nationalists set up Crimean Provisional Regional Government, with V.D. Nabokov as Minister of Justice.

1919

February. Arranges to join Iury Rausch's regiment, but on February 23/March 8, learns that Iury has just died.

March/April. With Bolshevik troops advancing deep into Crimea, evacuation is ordered. On March 26/April 8, family leaves Livadia.

April 2/15. Family flees from Sebastopol to Athens on Greek steamer *Nadezhda* as Red Army retakes Crimea.

April-May. Family in Piraeus, near Athens. Three love affairs in three and a half weeks.

May 27. Family arrives in London, rents rooms at 55 Stanhope Gardens. Meets and resumes relationship with Eva Lubryjinska.

July. Family moves to 6 Elm Park Gardens.

October 1. Begins Cambridge. Shares rooms with Mikhail Kalashnikov at R6, Great Court, Trinity. At first reads Natural Sciences (Zoology) and Modern and Medieval Languages (French and Russian), but soon drops Zoology. Devotes energies to writing Russian poetry and tending goal for Trinity's soccer team.

1920

January. Moves with Kalashnikov into lodgings at 2 Trinity Lane.

February. First lepidoptera paper published (in English).

Ends relationship with Eva Lubryjinska, conducts active love-life in Cambridge and London.

May–June. V.D. Nabokov visits Berlin to set up Russian newspaper there. Because of low cost of living, Berlin becoming center of emigration.

summer. Accepts father's wager that he cannot translate Romain Rolland's *Colas Breugnon* into Russian.

August. Family moves to Berlin, renting rooms at 1 Egerstrasse in the Grunewald. V.D. Nabokov helps set up Russian publishing firm, Slovo, and daily liberal newspaper, *Rul'*.

November 16. Rul' begins publishing.

November 27. VN's first poem in *Rul'*, signed "Cantab."

1921

January 7. Publishes poem and story, using pseudonym "Vladimir Sirin" to distinguish his byline from his father's. Begins to flood *Rul'* with his compositions (at first poems, then also plays, stories, crossword puzzles, and reviews). Retains "Sirin" pseudonym for Russian work until the 1960s.

March. Completes translation of *Colas Breugnon.*

April. Sits exams for Part I of Cambridge Tripos, passing with first-class honors and distinction in Russian.

June. In Berlin meets sixteen-year-old Svetlana Siewert. They are soon in love.

September 5. Family moves closer to town, 67 Sächsische Strasse in Wilmersdorf.

October. Poet Sasha Chorny helps V.D. Nabokov choose poems for large book of VN's verse.

October-November. Writes first playlet, supposed translation of early-nineteenth-century play *The Wanderers* by "Vivian Calmbrood."

December. Ski trip to Switzerland with Cambridge friend Robert de Calry. Visits Cécile Miauton.

1922

March 28. Two Russian ultra-rightists, aiming to assassinate CD leader Paul Miliukov, instead shoot and kill V.D. Nabokov when he leaps to Miliukov's defense.

May. Sits exams for Part II of Cambridge Tripos.

June. Graduates with second-class honors, returns to Berlin on June 21, becomes engaged to Svetlana Siewert.

summer. Commissioned to translate *Alice in Wonderland* into Russian, completes the job quickly.

October. Member of short-lived literary group Vereteno (The Spindle) during émigré Berlin's most volatile artistic period.

November. Member of literary group Bratstvo kruglogo stola (Brotherhood of the Round Table), becomes friends with fiction-writer Ivan Lukash. *Nikolka Persik* (translation of *Colas Breugnon*) published.

December. Grozd' (*The Cluster*) published, mostly poems for Svetlana Siewert.

1923

January. Engagement with Svetlana broken off by her parents because he has not found a steady job. Begins to write short stories.

Gornii put' (*The Empyrean Path*, poems) published.

March. Translation *Ania v strane chudes* (*Alice in Wonderland*) published. Writes verse play *Smert'* (*Death*).

May 8. Meets Véra Evseevna Slonim at charity ball.

May–August. To stave off depression after father's death and end of engagement, works as agricultural laborer in south of France. Writes verse plays.

August. Returns to Berlin and seeks out Véra Slonim. They are soon in love.

September. Begins writing stories regularly.

October. Mother moves to Prague with daughter Elena.

December. Challenges writer Aleksandr Drozdov to duel for dishonest attack on his work. Drozdov does not reply.

Accompanies brother Kirill to Prague. Writes five-act verse play, *The Tragedy of Mr. Morn.*

1924

January. Meets poet Marina Tsvetaeva.

January 26. Completes *Morn*, returns next day to Berlin.

spring. Writes stories and composes with Lukash sketches for Russian cabarets in Berlin.

Though the center of the emigration shifts to Paris during this year, VN alone of major émigré writers remains in Berlin—partly out of fear that his Russian will atrophy in country where he knows the local language well.

August. Visits mother and family outside Prague.

September. Begins earning living by tutoring English, Russian, tennis, even boxing. Tutoring will remain major source of income until 1929 and continue sporadically until 1941.

1925

January. Begins writing part of first novel, *Mashen'ka* (*Mary*).

April 15. Marries Véra Slonim in Berlin town hall.

late April. Moves to 13 Luitpoldstrasse, in Schöneberg area. Takes on regular pupils, especially Alexander Sak and Sergei Kaplan.

August. Takes Véra to meet his mother, near Prague, then has two weeks at Zoppot on the Baltic looking after Alexander Sak. With Sak on walking tour of Schwarzwald. Rejoins Véra in Constance.

September. Moves to rooms at 31 Motzstrasse, begins *Mary* in earnest, completing it at end of October.

October. Writes major story "The Return of Chorb."

December. Writes major story "A Guide to Berlin."

Raisa Tatarinov and Iuly Aikhenval'd establish literary circle, where VN will often give talks.

The Nabokovs accompany Sergei Kaplan on skiing trip to Krummhübel.

1926

January. Reads *Mary* from end to end in literary circle. Aikhenval'd proclaims "A new Turgenev has appeared."

March. Mashen'ka published (trans. *Mary*, 1970).

August. The Nabokovs act as chaperones for three children at Binz, on the Baltic coast, then move on their own to nearby Misdroy.

September. Move into rooms at 12 Passauer Strasse, Berlin.

fall. Writes play *Chelovek iz SSSR* (trans. *The Man from the USSR*, 1984) for Berlin's new émigré Group Theater. Begins writing frequent poetry reviews for *Rul'*.

December. Writes long Pushkinian poem, *A University Poem.*

1927

May. Acts part of playwright Nikolai Evreinov in revue.

July–August. The Nabokovs act as chaperones for three boys at Binz. There hits on the idea for next novel, *King, Queen, Knave.*

September. Writes major story "An Affair of Honor."

1928

January–June. Writes *King, Queen, Knave.*

July. At Baltic resort of Misdroy.

September. Korol', dama, valet published (trans. *King, Queen, Knave*, 1968); German serial and book rights pay well.

December 15. Influential critic and champion of VN's work Iuly Aikhenval'd killed by tram after leaving party at the Nabokovs'.

1929

February. With the money from German rights to *King, Queen, Knave*, the Nabokovs travel to Le Boulou in the Eastern Pyrenées to chase butterflies. Begins first masterpiece, *The Defense.*

April. Move west to Saurat for warmth.

June. Return to Berlin. They spend summer on small lakeside plot of land on which they have put deposit.

August. Finishes *The Defense.* It is published serially in the leading literary review of the emigration, *Sovremennye zapiski*, October 1929–April 1930. Already considered the best of the young émigré writers, Sirin now recognized as among the

Russian classics. All his remaining Russian novels will be published serially in *Sovremennye zapiski*, which pays better than émigré book publishers.

December. Collection of stories and poems, *The Return of Chorb*, published.

1930

February. Completes novella *The Eye.*

March. Georgy Ivanov launches scurrilous attack on Sirin. Writes major story "The Aurelian."

May. Begins new novel, *Glory.* Visits mother in Prague for two weeks.

September. Zashchita Luzhina published in book form (trans. *The Defense*, 1964).

November. Completes *Glory. Sogliadatai* published in *Sovremennye zapiski* (trans. *The Eye*, 1966).

1931

January–May. Writes novel *Camera Obscura.*

February–December. Glory published in *Sovremennye zapiski.*

1932

January. Move to 29 Westfälische Strasse.

April. Visits Prague.

May. Writes major story "Perfection."

May 1932–May 1933. Camera Obscura published in *Sovremennye zapiski.*

June. Begins novel *Despair.*

July 31. Move to 22 Nestorstrasse, where the Nabokovs remain with Véra's cousin Anna Feigin until they leave Germany.

September. Finishes first draft of *Despair.*

October. Two-week visit with cousin Nicolas Nabokov in Kolbsheim.

late October–November. Visits Paris for highly successful public reading.

November. Podvig published in book form (trans. *Glory*, 1972).

November 26. Leaves Paris for Berlin, via readings in Antwerp and Brussels, bringing with him revised text of *Despair.*

1933

January. Begins gathering materials for his greatest Russian novel, *The Gift.* Protracted attack of neuralgia intercostalis.

Hitler appointed Chancellor and begins to quash civil liberties. Véra loses secretarial job when Jewish firm for which she works closed down.

December. Kamera obskura published in book form (trans. *Camera Obscura*, 1936 and *Laughter in the Dark*, 1938).

December 30. Speaks at reception for Ivan Bunin, who has just become first Russian to win Nobel Prize for Literature.

1934

January–October. Despair published in *Sovremennye zapiski.*

January–February. Writes story "The Circle," an eccentric orbit around the world of *The Gift.*

May 10. Only child, son Dmitri, born.

June. Breaks off writing "Life of Chernyshevski" chapter in *The Gift* to write anti-totalitarian novel *Invitation to a Beheading.*

September 15. Completes first draft (first revision?) of *Invitation to a Beheading.*
late December. Completes revisions.

1935

January–February. Writes major story "Torpid Smoke."
May. Dissatisfied with *Camera Obscura,* first English translation of his work.
June. Begins writing chapter 2 of *The Gift* (butterfly expeditions into Central Asia).
Unable to find reliable English translator, and beginning to sense that Hitler's plans will put an end to the Russian emigration and might force him to switch languages, translates *Otchaianie* himself, as *Despair.*
June 1935–March 1936. Invitation to a Beheading published in *Sovremennye zapiski.*
late summer. Writes short autobiographical piece in English.
December 29. Finishes translation of *Despair.*

1936

January. Having to prepare at short notice something for French-speaking audience, writes "Mademoiselle O," memoir of his French governess.
January–February. Reading tour of Brussels, Antwerp, and Paris. Both Russian and French readings highly successful.
February. Otchaianie published (trans. *Despair,* 1936, rev. 1966).
spring?. Composes verse for *The Gift.*
April. Writes major story "Spring in Fialta."
May. After Véra, as a Jew, loses last job, VN learns that one of the assassins of his father has been appointed second-in-command to Hitler's head of Russian émigré affairs, and immediately begins searching for job teaching Russian literature in US.
late spring–summer?. Writes a few chapters (all lost) of autobiography in English.
August. Begins chapter 1 of *The Gift.*
September–November. Seeks job anywhere in English-speaking world.

1937

January 18. Leaves Germany for last time for reading tour and to seek job in France or England.
February. In Paris, four-month affair with Irina Guadanini begins. Plagued by guilt, develops severe psoriasis, near suicide.
late February. Readings in London, visit to Cambridge.
April. Despair published in England, first book he has written in English. Chapter 1 of *The Gift* published in *Sovremennye zapiski,* though remaining chapters incomplete.
Véra and Dmitri leave Berlin for Prague, where VN joins them in May.
June. In Marienbad, writes major story "Cloud, Castle, Lake."
July. Move to Cannes. Tells Véra of affair. After arguments, uneasy peace.
August. Sovremennye zapiski editors refuse to print Chernyshevsky chapter of *The Gift.*
September. Irina Guadanini visits VN in Cannes; he asks her to leave. Bobbs-Merrill offers $600 advance for *Camera Obscura.* Retranslates, rewrites, and retitles as *Laughter in the Dark.*
mid-October. Move to Menton, to 11 rue Partonneaux. Works on chapter 3 of *The Gift.*

November–December. Writes three-act play *The Event* for new Russian Theater in Paris.

1938

January. Completes *The Gift.*
March. The Event premiered in Paris.
April. Laughter in the Dark published (first book in US).
May–June. Writes major story "Tyrants Destroyed."
July. Moves to Moulinet, in hills behind Menton, captures his first new subspecies of butterfly.
August. Move to Cap d'Antibes.
September. Writes play *The Waltz Invention.* Story collection *The Eye* published.
October. Move to Paris, 8 rue de Saigon. Writes major story "The Visit to the Museum." Final instalment of *The Gift* in *Sovremennye zapiski.*
November. Writes major story "Lik." *Priglashenie na kazn'* published in book form (trans. *Invitation to a Beheading,* 1959).
December. Writing first English novel, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight.*

1939

January. Completes *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight.*
February. Dinner with James Joyce at their mutual friends', the Léons.
April. Financially desperate without a work permit in France, travels to England again in a vain search for literary or academic work.
May 2. Mother dies in Prague.
May 31–June 14. Trip to England on job search.
June–September. At Fréjus on Riviera.
September. Return to Paris.
fall. Fellow émigré novelist Mark Aldanov, offered a summer teaching post at Stanford, declines and passes offer to VN.
October–November. Writes novella *The Enchanter,* first attempt at the *Lolita* story.
December. After securing US visas, Nabokovs begin laborious process of seeking French exit visas.

1940

winter–spring. In preparation for an academic future in US, writes lectures on Russian literature. Begins final Russian novel, *Solus Rex.* Though left incomplete when VN, settled in US, realizes his English style can develop only if he renounces Russian fiction, two chapters are finished and published as separate major stories, "Ultima Thule" and "Solus Rex."
May. With help of Russian Jewish organizations, Nabokovs flee to US on board the *Champlain,* just before the fall of Paris.
May 28. Arrive in New York.
June 10. Move to apartment at 1326 Madison Avenue.
July 15. To West Wardboro, Vermont, where friend Mikhail Karpovich has farmhouse as vacation home for émigré friends.
mid-September. Move to New York apartment at 35 West 87th Street.
October 8. Meets Edmund Wilson.

fall. Writes reviews for *The New Republic* and *New York Sun*, begins lepidoptera research at American Museum of Natural History.
winter. Writes more lectures.

1941

winter. Tutors privately in Russian, writes two lepidoptera papers.
March. Two weeks of lectures at Wellesley College a triumphant success.
April. Begins translating Pushkin and other Russian verse for summer course.
May. Offered one-year appointment in comparative literature at Wellesley.
June. Family driven across US by Russian tutee Dorothy Leuthold. On June 7 discovers new species of butterfly on rim of Grand Canyon, names it *Neonympha dorothea.*
June–August. At 230 Sequoia Avenue, Palo Alto. Teaches creative writing and Russian literature at Stanford. Begins writing *Bend Sinister*?
September 11. Head east, to New York and then Wellesley.
late September. At 19 Appleby Road, Wellesley. Begins year as Resident Lecturer in Comparative Literature, almost writer-in-residence, at Wellesley College.
fall. Translates Gogol, Pushkin, Lermontov, Tiutchev for teaching. Begins traveling into Cambridge to Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology, where he volunteers to set the lepidoptera collection in order.
December 18. The Real Life of Sebastian Knight published at last.

1942

spring. Despite faculty backing, not reappointed at Wellesley, as his anatagonism to Soviet Union, acceptable a year earlier, embarrasses college president Mildred McAfee now that Germany has invaded Russia.
May. Commissioned to translate poems of Pushkin and Tiutchev and to write critical book on Gogol.
June. Appointed Research Fellow in Entomology at the MCZ for 1942–43. For the next four years spends more time at microscope or preparing his lepidoptera research for publication than in writing fiction.
June, July–August. At Karpoviches' in West Wardboro, Vermont, working hard on Gogol book.
September 1. Move to 8 Craigie Circle, Cambridge.
September 30–October 25. For money, undertakes whistle-stop lecturing tour in South (South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee).
November 5–18. Continues tour to Minnesota and Illinois. Because travel costs consume lecture fees, cancels remainder of tour.
early December. Lecture in Virginia.

1943

winter. By now specializing in Lycaenids, begins major rethinking of the genus.
January. Writes first English story, "The Assistant Producer," for *The Atlantic.*
spring. Teaches noncredit course in elementary Russian at Wellesley College.
March. Guggenheim award (June 1943–June 1944) for *Bend Sinister* announced.
May. Completes *Nikolai Gogol.*
late June–early September. At Alta Lodge, Sandy, Utah, catching butterflies and moths, working on *Bend Sinister.*
September. Starts again noncredit Russian course at Wellesley.

1944

January. Véra persuades him to devote more time to *Bend Sinister.*
March. Offered official 1944–45 Wellesley course in elementary Russian.
June. First-reading agreement signed with *The New Yorker.*
June 6. Serious attack of food poisoning.
summer. Writes more of *Bend Sinister* and story "Time and Ebb."
August. Nikolai Gogol published.
September. Appointed lecturer at Wellesley, begins course in elementary Russian.

1945

February. Three Russian Poets published (verse translations of Pushkin, Lermontov, Tiutchev).
April. First story accepted by *New Yorker.*
spring. Begins wearing glasses for reading, a consequence of work at microscope.
June. Stops smoking under doctor's advice, gains 60 pounds over summer.
July 12. Becomes US citizen.
September. Begins teaching intermediate as well as elementary Russian at Wellesley.

1946

January. Russian literature course for 1946–47 approved. Hurries to complete *Bend Sinister.*
June. Finishes revision of *Bend Sinister.*
June–August. Near breakdown after rush to complete novel. Unsuccessful holiday on Newfound Lake, New Hampshire.
September. Begins teaching Russian literature in translation course at Wellesley, alongside elementary and intermediate Russian.
fall 1946–spring 1947. Research for major lepidoptera monograph on nearctic Lycaeides.

1947

April. Planning *Lolita* and autobiography.
May. Writes major story "Signs and Symbols."
June. Bend Sinister published.
June–September. Butterfly hunting at Estes Park, Colorado. Writing first chapters of autobiography for enthusiastic *New Yorker.*
September. Wellesley courses as previous year.
October–November. Visits Cornell as potential professor of Russian literature. When offer comes, no counter-offer of permanent appointment at Wellesley.
December. Nine Stories published.

1948

spring. Serious lung troubles, often confined to bed.
July 1. Arrives in Ithaca the day his appointment as professor of Russian literature at Cornell begins. Buy their first car, which Véra learns to drive.
September. Move to 957 East State St. Begins Russian Literature 151–2 (survey in translation) and Russian Literature 301–2 (survey in Russian). Has to translate medieval Russian heroic tale, *Slovo o polku Igoreve* (*The Song of Igor's Campaign*) for classes.

1949

January. Begins to contemplate literal translation of *Eugene Onegin.*
February. Introduces additional course, Russian Poetry 1870–1925.
June. Drive West for their first summer butterfly hunt by car.
July. At writer's conference at University of Utah, Salt Lake City.
late July–August. Butterfly hunting in Wyoming.
September. Begins English and Russian survey courses and Pushkin seminar.

1950

April. Hospitalized with neuralgia intercostalis.
May. Finishes *Conclusive Evidence.*
June. Discovers specimens of rare *Lycaeides samuelis,* which he had been first to classify, at Karner, near Albany.
summer. Under pressure from head of Cornell's Division of Literature to teach to larger number of students, writes lectures for new European fiction course on Austen, Dickens, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Stevenson, Proust, Kafka and Joyce.
July?. Begins writing *Lolita.* Dissatisfied, nearly burns manuscript, but Véra dissuades him.
September. Begins courses for the year. Russian literature in translation, the Modernist Movement in Russian Literature, and Masterpieces of European Fiction.

1951

February 14. Conclusive Evidence published to excellent reviews but sells poorly.
February–March. Writes major story "The Vane Sisters."
June. Invited to replace Karpovich and one course by Harry Levin at Harvard in spring 1952.
late June–August. Butterfly hunts through Colorado, Wyoming, Montana; catches first female of *Lycaeides sublivens.*
late August. In Ithaca, move to 623 Highland Road.
September. Begins courses for the year. Russian survey, Pushkin seminar, European fiction. Dmitri starts Harvard B.A.
October. Writes last short story, "Lance."

1952

spring. Visiting Lecturer in Slavic Languages and Literatures at Harvard, teaching Slavic 150 (Modernism), Slavic 152 (Pushkin) and Humanities 2, The Novel, including *Don Quixote.*
April. Dar at last published in book form and in toto (trans. *The Gift,* 1963).
Awarded second Guggenheim Fellowship, to allow time for translating and annotating Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin.*
late June–August. Butterfly hunting in Wyoming. Writing *Lolita.*
September. In Ithaca, move to 106 Hampton Road. Begins courses for the year. Russian survey, Modernism, and European fiction, which now has 200 students.

1953

February. On leave from Cornell, move to Cambridge, stopping at Ambassador Hotel. Intense work on *Eugene Onegin* commentaries.
April–May. Butterfly hunting in Arizona. Writing *Lolita.*
June–August. Butterfly hunting in Ashland, Oregon. Writing *Lolita* and first chapter of *Pnin.*

September. In Ithaca, move to 957 East State Street. Begins courses for the year. Russian survey, Pushkin, European fiction.

fall. Applies intense pressure to complete *Lolita.* Finishes on December 6 and begins search for US publisher.

December 9. Morris Bishop recommends promotion to full professor.

1954

January. Writes second chapter of *Pnin.*

February–March. Rushes to complete Russian translation and expansion of autobiography, adding material for émigré audience.

April. Several lectures at the University of Kansas, Lawrence.

June–August. To Taos, New Mexico. Annotates *Anna Karenin* for projected Modern Library edition.

September. In Ithaca, move to 700 Stewart Avenue.

fall. Works feverishly on *Eugene Onegin.*

1955

January. Writes chapter 3 of *Pnin.*

February. After *Lolita*'s rejection, for fear of prosecution, by several US publishers, sends MS to European agent.

spring. Writing *Pnin.*

June 6. Signs contract for *Lolita* with Olympia Press, Paris.

June. Dmitri graduates cum laude from Harvard.

July. In Ithaca, move to 808 Hanshaw Road.

late July–early August. Hospitalized for lumbago.

August. Completes *Pnin.*

September. Lolita published in English in Paris.

December 25. Graham Greene selects *Lolita* as one of the three best books of the year in the London *Sunday Times.*

1956

February. At 16 Chauncy Street, Cambridge, for start of term's sabbatical, conducts final research for *Eugene Onegin* at Harvard.

February–March. Scandal begins to break around *Lolita* after John Gordon denounces it in British *Sunday Express.*

March. Vesna v Fial'te i drugie rasskazy (*Spring in Fialta and Other Stories*) published.

May. Butterfly hunting in southern Utah.

May–July. Finishes revising and writes introduction for Dmitri's translation of Lermontov's novel *A Hero of Our Time.*

July–early August. Butterfly hunting in Wyoming, Montana, Minnesota, and Michigan.

September. Writes "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*" for *Anchor Review Lolita* issue, designed to test American public reaction.

December. At request of Britain, French government bans *Lolita* and 24 other Olympia titles. Girodias of Olympia sues French government; case becomes known as "l'affaire *Lolita.*"

1957

January. Finishes *Eugene Onegin*'s "Notes on Prosody."

winter. Almost offered post at Harvard until Roman Jakobson opposes. "Gentlemen, even if one allows that he is an important writer, are we next to invite an elephant to be Professor of Zoology?"

February. Move to 880 Highland Road, Ithaca.

March. Begins but has to leave aside work on what will become *Pale Fire* as he rushes to finish *Eugene Onegin.*

March 7. Pnin published to rave reviews, into second printing within two weeks.

summer. Stays in Ithaca, rushing to complete *Eugene Onegin.*

June. Anchor Review publishes a third of *Lolita,* with Nabokov's afterword and critical commentary.

September. Drops Russian seminar course because of lack of qualified students.

fall. Becoming campus celebrity in wake of *Lolita* publicity and nomination of *Pnin* for National Book Award.

December. Finishes *Eugene Onegin.*

1958

February. Move to 404 Highland Road, final Ithaca address.

Despite Girodias's insisting on half of royalties, contract for American *Lolita* at last worked out with Putnam.

March 6. A Hero of Our Time published.

June–July. Butterfly hunting in Montana, Alberta, Wyoming.

August 18. Lolita published in U.S., sells 100,000 in first three weeks, fastest sales since *Gone With the Wind.*

September. Harris-Kubrick Pictures buy *Lolita* rights for $150,000.

September 18. Nabokov's Dozen (thirteen stories) published.

November. Awarded year's leave of absence from Cornell, searches for replacement so that leave can begin in February.

December. Novelist Herbert Gold accepted as substitute.

1959

January 19. Delivers last Cornell lecture.

January. Bollingen Press agrees to publish *Eugene Onegin.*

February. First notes for *Texture of Time* project.

February 24. Leaves Ithaca for New York City, takes apartment in Windermere Hotel, completes translation of *Song of Igor's Campaign.*

April. Butterfly collecting in Tennessee and Texas.

May–July. At Oak Creek Canyon, Arizona, catches butterflies, checks Dmitri's translation of *Invitation to a Beheading.*

early August. In Los Angeles to discuss with Kubrick writing *Lolita* screenplay, but cannot accept changes Kubrick wants.

August. Poems published.

September. In New York for business.

September 21. Invitation to a Beheading (*Priglashenie na kazn'*, written 1934, serialized 1935–6, published 1938) published. Translated by Dmitri Nabokov in collaboration with his father, the first of the Russian works to be resurrected in the wake of VN's new fame. The rest of his Russian fiction will appear in the same way. new introduction by the author, text translated entirely by him when major revisions are required, or by Dmitri (when he has time) or another translator working under VN's detailed supervision.

September 29. Sails to Europe to see sister Elena and brother Kirill, to promote the French, British and Italian *Lolita*s, and to install Dmitri, who hopes for an operatic career, with a singing teacher in Milan. Expects to return to US for good in three months.

October. With Elena and Kirill in Geneva.

October 23. Gallimard stages mammoth reception in Paris for French *Lolita.*

November 4. Lecture at Cambridge as part of campaign to establish respectability of *Lolita*, in case of last-minute censorship problems.

November 6. English *Lolita* published without the feared prosecution for obscenity.

November–December. Rome, Taormina, Genoa, Milan, San Remo. In Genoa at end of November eludes press, and begins *Letters to Terra* project.

December. Kubrick cables asking VN to take on *Lolita* screenplay with more artistic freedom; having seen own solution to problems of screenplay, accepts.

1960

January–February. Menton.

February 18. Head for Los Angeles by boat from Le Havre and train from New York.

March 10. At 2088 Mandeville Canyon Road, Brentwood Heights, writing *Lolita* screenplay for Kubrick.

early July. Butterfly hunting in the High Sierras.

September 8. Sends Kubrick completed screenplay.

October 12. To New York. Stays at Hampshire House.

October 28. Records in diary idea for a novel "which is only the elaborate commentary to a gradually evolved short poem."

November. Cross Atlantic on *Queen Elizabeth*; Paris, Milan, Nice. On 29th, begins poem "Pale Fire," composes intently over winter.

December 3. Move to 57 promenade des Anglais.

1961

late April. To Reggio Emilia for Dmitri's debut as an operatic bass.

May. Stresa. Revises Dmitri's translation of Chapter 1 of *The Gift.*

June–August. Champex-Lac in Switzerland, chasing butterflies and writing *Pale Fire.*

August 7. To Montreux, Hotel Belmont.

October 1. Move to Hotel Montreux Palace.

December 4. Completes *Pale Fire.*

1962

January–March. Revises Michael Scammell's translation of last four chapters of *The Gift.*

April 25. Pale Fire published, *Newsweek* cover story on VN.

June. Takes *Queen Elizabeth* to New York for *Lolita* premiere. Disappointed by film but diplomatic. *Queen Elizabeth* back to Europe.

July. Butterfly hunting at Zermatt.

August. To Cannes, but rejects idea of buying land there.

September 15. To Montreux Palace, where they move to sixth-floor quarters retained until 1990.

October. Weidenfeld agrees on revised, illustrated *Speak, Memory* and comprehensive catalogue of the *Butterflies of Europe.* VN begins working on latter.

1963

January. After months of working on proofs of *Eugene Onegin*, thoroughly revises translation.

February. Begins translating *Lolita* into Russian, and resumes work on *The Texture of Time*, but most of year working on *Butterflies of Europe.*

April. Visits Corsica for butterflies.

May 27. The Gift (*Dar*, written 1932–7, serialized 1937–8, published 1952) published. Reviews stress extent and achievement of *oeuvre.*

May-July. To Loeche-les-Bains; *July-August*, Les Diablerets; *August 19*, back to Montreux.

October–November. Corrects Scammell's translation of *The Defense.*

December. Writes review of Walter Arndt's translation of *Eugene Onegin. Butterflies of Europe* becoming still more ambitious.

1964

January. Edmund Wilson visits for last time.

March. Begins to think about book on *Butterflies in Art.*

March-April. To US by boat for launch of *Eugene Onegin.* Lectures in New York and at Harvard.

June. Eugene Onegin published at last.

July–August. To Crans-sur-Sierre, *August 18*, back to Montreux.

September. The Defense (*Zashchita Luzhina*, written 1929, serialized 1929–30, published 1930) published.

late September. Resumes serious work on *The Texture of Time* while waiting for British Museum replies to his queries for *Butterflies of Europe.*

December. Resumes work on Russian *Lolita.*

late December–early January. To Abano, near Padua.

1965

March. Completes Russian translation of *Lolita*, begins extensive revision of his 1936 translation of *Despair.*

April–June. To Gardone for butterflies. Writing *The Texture of Time.*

July. To St. Moritz for butterflies. Reads Edmund Wilson's review of *Eugene Onegin*, writes immediate reply. Controversy draws in others (Anthony Burgess, Robert Lowell, George Steiner) as it heats up over next year.

August 10. Back to Montreux.

September. Unable to endure any longer distraction of publishing uncertainties about *Butterflies of Europe*, cancels project.

September 15. The Eye (*Sogliadatai*, written 1929–1930, serialized November 1930, book 1938) published.

October–November. Writes longer reply to critics of *Eugene Onegin*, especially Wilson.

November. Begins revising *Speak, Memory.*

December. First detailed flash of *Ada.*

1966

January. Completes *Speak, Memory* revisions.

February. Sees link between story of Van and Ada and his *Texture of Time* and *Letters from Terra* projects, and begins to compose *Ada* at a rapid rate.

February. The Waltz Invention (*Izobretenie Val'sa*, written and published 1938), published.
April–August. In Italy (Milan, Pompeii, Naples, Amalfi, Chianciano Terme, Ponte di Legno), writing *Ada* and exploring galleries and museums for *Butterflies in Art.*
May. Despair (*Otchaianie*, written 1932, serialized 1934, published 1936) published.
August. At Bad Tarasp *September*, back to Montreux.
November. With *Ada* going strong, stops to revise *Eugene Onegin*, making it still more literal despite protests of critics.
December–February. Checks Dmitri's translation of *King, Queen, Knave* and rewrites extensively.

1967

January. Revised *Speak, Memory* published.
April–June. Camogli, Italy. Intense work on *Ada.*
June–August. Limone Piemonte, Italy. *Ada* still surging.
August. Lolita published in Russian.
November. Véra, in New York to arrange bringing aging cousin Anna Feigin back to Montreux, settles final details of eleven-book, $250,000 contract with McGraw-Hill.

1968

April. King, Queen, Knave (*Korol', dama, valet*, written 1927–8, published 1928) published.
May. Agrees to Andrew Field's undertaking his biography.
May–July. Bex-les-Bains and Verbier; *August,* back to Montreux.
October. Completes *Ada.*
December. Begins to translate his Russian poems for *Poems and Problems.*

1969

May 5. Ada published, to great critical acclaim and popular attention (*Time* cover, *New York Times Book Review* front-page rave, large advance extract in *Playboy*) that marks the high point of VN's reputation; *Ada*'s difficulty and the high praise will produce a lasting backlash.
June–August. Lugano and Adelboden; *August 22,* back to Montreux.
October 7. Begins writing *Transparent Things*, but progress slow.

1970

January. Completes compilation of *Poems and Problems.*
February. Revises Michael Glenny's translation of *Mary.*
March. To Rome.
April–May. To Taormina for butterflies; *May-June*, Montreux.
July. To Saas Fee. *Transparent Things* "bursts into life" (diary, June 30).
late July. Back to Montreux.
September. Mary (*Mashen'ka*, written 1925–26, published 1926) published.
September–December. Revises *Glory*, last of his Russian novels to be translated.

1971

spring. Begins translating Russian stories with Dmitri for collected McGraw-Hill volumes.
March. Poems and Problems published.

late March–early April. Flies to Praia da Rocha, Portugal, but few butterflies and returns to Montreux early.
May. To Draguignan, France; *June*, Anzère, Switzerland, for a week; *August* near Saanen and Gstaad, Switzerland.
November. After five-month pause, *Transparent Things* begins steady "retrickle" (diary).
December. Glory (*Podvig*, written 1930, serialized 1931–32, published 1932) published.

1972

April 1. After intense four months, completes *Transparent Things.*
April 14–May 5. Butterfly hunting in Amélie-les-Bains, Pyrenées Orientales.
June 19–July 18. To Lenzerheide; *August*, near Saanen and Gstaad.
September-October. Prepares *Strong Opinions.*
October 13. Transparent Things published.
November–December. Prepares *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories.*

1973

January–February. Reads and corrects manuscript of Andrew Field's *Nabokov. His Life in Part.*
February 6. Begins writing *Look at the Harlequins!*
April. Begins with Dmitri translating stories for *Details of a Sunset.*
April 10. A Russian Beauty and Other Stories published.
June. To Cervia, Italy.
July. Butterfly hunting in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy.
August 3. Back to Montreux.
August–September. Reads and corrects revised manuscript of Field's biography. Final rift with Field.
September 25. Returns to *Look at the Harlequins!*, writing out final consecutive draft.
November. Strong Opinions published.

1974

winter-spring. Deeply engrossed in *Look at the Harlequins!* Finishes April 3.
February. Lolita. A Screenplay published.
May. Receives manuscript of French *Ada*, begins revising. Has new novel (eventually *The Original of Laura*) "mapped out rather clearly for next year."
June–July. Butterfly hunting and revising French *Ada* at Zermatt.
July 27–August 2. Butterfly hunting at Sarnico, Italy.
August 27. Look at the Harlequins! published.
November. Mashen'ka (original of *Mary*) and *Podvig* (original of *Glory*) reissued by Ardis, who will reissue all of VN's Russian *oeuvre* over the next decade.
late November. Resumes intense work on checking French *Ada.*

1975

January. Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories published.
February. Completes revisions to French *Ada.*
March-April. Checks galleys and page proofs of French *Ada.* Exhausted by efforts to meet May deadline.
June 18–July. Butterfly hunting at Davos. Late July, severe fall on mountainside.

August–September. Unwell, tests show tumor on prostate.
October 16. Operation, tumor benign.
December. Returns to writing *The Original of Laura.*
December 30. Revised translation of *Eugene Onegin* published.

1976

March 9. Details of a Sunset and Other Stories published, completing VN's collected stories.
April 20. Reports that he anticipates completing new novel before summer over.
May 1. Trips, suffers concussion, goes to hospital for ten days, returns feeling leaden.
June. Lumbago attack postpones summer excursion, undiagnosed infection causes fever.
June 17–September 7. Semi-conscious, admitted to hospital. Delirious much of summer.
fall. Selects poems for Ardis *Stikhi* (*Poems*). Weak, almost no sleep, can write out little of *The Original of Laura.*

1977

March 19–May 7. Catches cold from Dmitri, develops fever, re-hospitalized in Lausanne.
June 5. Fever again, back to Lausanne hospital.
late June. Severe bronchial congestion.
July 2. Dies in Lausanne hospital of fluid buildup in lungs.
July 7. Cremated in Vevey, buried at Clarens cemetery.

Brian Boyd

NOTE

1. Editor's note. Polish spelling "Ewa Lubrzyńska."

The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov

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ADA

Of all Nabokov's works, none divides readers more than *Ada*.[1] Some consider it his richest fare, others his most indigestible. Just after its publication, Mary McCarthy's revulsion moved her to consider recanting her rapturous appraisal of *Pale Fire*.[2] Conversely, my thesis supervisor tried to interest another academic friend in Nabokov, only to fail with novel after novel until *Ada* left him entranced.

Nabokov himself had no doubts. His father had once given him a copy of *Madame Bovary* which he had inscribed "livre génial—la perle de la littérature française" ("a book of genius—the pearl of French literature"). In his own copy of *Ada,* Nabokov wrote on the flyleaf: "genial'naia kniga—perl amerikanskoi literatury" ("a book of genius—the pearl of American literature").[3] Though this may well be a joke, a playfully outrageous echo, an Antiterran paradox, there must also have been a grain of seriousness to provoke that "pearl" into being. After all, *Ada*'s long part 1 opens with an echo of the opening of *Anna Karenin* and ends with an echo of the end of part 1 of *Madame Bovary,* as if it were signaling its intention to vie with the greatest novels of the Russian and the French traditions. That, some readers would say, is precisely the problem. Like Van and Ada themselves, Nabokov has become too sure of himself.

Most of Nabokov's major novels stand apart from the others, *Invitation to a Beheading* by its irrealism, *The Gift* by its texture, *Lolita* by its subject, *Pale Fire* by its structure. *Ada* stands out in all these ways. *Invitation to a Beheading* may seem odd for Nabokov, yet fabulation runs through fiction from Apuleius to Zamiatin. But *Ada* combines the things that shore up realism—a plethora of dates (enough to annoy John Updike),[4] places and details—with anachronisms, anatopisms, and inventions (shattal trees, skybab squirrels, skimmers) that presuppose a minute knowledge of our real world but undermine it at every line. *The Gift*'s slow unfurling, its combination of mental mobility within physical stasis, marks it out from all Nabokov's other fiction, but not as much

as *Ada*'s manic shifts in space and time, subject, reference and tone, within one centrifugal sentence after another. In the afterword to *Lolita*, Nabokov compared the unacceptability of its subject to American publishers with that of two other themes, "a Negro-White marriage which is a complete and glorious success resulting in lots of children and grandchildren; and the total atheist who lives a happy and useful life, and dies in his sleep at the age of 106" (*Lo* 314). In *Ada* he found something to match: an incestuous love affair (and between two hugely and happily wealthy aristocrats) that lasts from childhood to old age, becoming a marriage in all but name, with the couple dying together peacefully in their late 90s. *Pale Fire* strikes immediately by its novelty of form, by the crazy fissure between Shade's poem and Kinbote's so-called commentary. *Ada* by contrast seems at first to play with the tradition of the novel by ironic imitation, but as each part shrinks to half the length of its predecessor, as the time between each part expands into decades, as the focus of each part judders further from Ada herself, *Ada* seems no longer to be playing with the form of the novel but to be unable to reassert it, to be plummeting out of control.

But it is not these aspects of its originality that provoke distaste. I suspect there are two main reasons.

The first is that *Ada* obtrudes its own difficulty and yet confronts us with its playfulness, even flippancy. In many ways *Ada* is more demanding than *Ulysses*, and lets us know it:

> "All happy families are more or less dissimilar; all unhappy ones are more or less alike," says a great Russian writer in the beginning of a famous novel (*Anna Arkadievitch Karenina*, transfigured into English by R.G. Stonelower, Mount Tabor Ltd., 1880). That pronouncement has little if any relation to the story to be unfolded now, a family chronicle, the first part of which is, perhaps, closer to another Tolstoy work, *Detstvo i Otrochestvo* (*Childhood and Fatherland*, Pontius Press, 1858).
>
> Van's maternal grandmother Daria ("Dolly") Durmanov was the daughter of Prince Peter Zemski, Governor of Bras d'Or, an American province in the Northeast of our variegated country, who had married, in 1824, Mary O'Reilly, an Irish woman of fashion. Dolly, an only child, born in Bras, married in 1840, at the tender and wayward age of fifteen, General Ivan Durmanov, Commander of Yukon Fortress and peaceful country gentleman, with lands in the Severn Tories (Severnïya Territorii), that tesselated protectorate still lovingly called "Russian" Estoty, which commingles, granoblastically and organically, with "Russian" Canady. . . .(3)

Why the distortion of *Anna Karenin*'s opening in the first line? Why the distortion of Tolstoy's title? What lurks in the strange name of the invented translator "Stonelower"? Why has the press been called "Mount Tabor Ltd."? Why quote from *Anna Karenin* at all if it has "little if any relation to the story to be unfolded now"? What is that unfamiliar Tolstoy work, *Detstvo i*

Otrochestvo (*Childhood and Fatherland*), and why has it been published by the suspiciously-named "Pontius Press"? Why are there Russians in North America? Why is Peter Zemski "Governor of Bras d'Or," wherever that is? Where are the "Severn Tories," and does the name really translate "Severnïya Territorii," and what does "tesselated" mean, and why does it commingle "granoblastically," whatever that means, with "'Russian' Canady," wherever that is?[5]

Now that is a lot of questions for the first twenty lines of a novel, closer to the enigmas of *Finnegans Wake* than the solid, impeccably rendered world of *Ulysses*. But *Finnegans Wake* takes on the whole of history, the whole of language, and the murkiness of the human mind in sleep. It is imbued with Joyce's characteristic rigor and extremism of method, and, anyway, it invites a few devotees, not a widespread audience. But *Ada* seems in many ways a grand old-fashioned novel, a simple love story, a series of colorful and even racy adventures. It appeals to a much larger readership than *Finnegans Wake* (it even became a number two bestseller in France), and then it rebuffs the audience with its difficulty *and* its levity, its apparent offhandedness. A book may earn the right to be difficult if it takes itself seriously, but not surely if it undermines itself at every step?

The second reason *Ada* might deter readers is that Van and Ada are brilliant, conceited, delighted to stress their difference from others around them and their uncanny similarity to each other. But they invite us to admire them and identify with them even as they remind us we could never be as brilliant as they. Can we believe in their brilliance? Do we not resent their arrogant superiority? Does Nabokov not realize how repellent he has made characters who seem both to see with his eyes and to see themselves as enchanting?

Yet there is a great deal of real enchantment in Van and Ada's story. A sense of wonder, of the unprecedented novelty and liberation of love, saturates the Ardis the First chapters of the novel: as Robert Alter comments, "the expression in *Ada* of a lover's consummated delight in life and beauty is an achievement that has few equals in the history of the novel."[6]

One of Nabokov's great gifts throughout his work has been to invent new structures for new stories. While he admired the technical innovations of *Ulysses*, he rejected the Homeric parallels because they did not arise out of the story of Stephen and Bloom. *Pale Fire*'s daring new structure, on the other hand, flows with perfect naturalness from the situation of a demented *littérateur* who appropriates for his own use a poem he vainly hoped would commemorate the past he imagines. In *Ada*, too, story and structure animate each other. Because Van and Ada experience the magic of first love together and against all the odds know the glow and comfort of last love, they can compose together the story of their shared past. That shapes our response to their story. Because we can glimpse them together in old age happily recalling the first flush of passion, we are both eager to see their young love triumph and

so confident that they will share their adult life that their long separations disappoint us almost as sharply as they do Van himself.

First love and last love meant a great deal to Nabokov. His love for Valentina Shul'gina gave rise to poem after poem in his youth, to his first novel, *Mary*, to his autobiographical story "First Love," and, fifty years after the fact, to much of the magic of the "Ardis" section of *Ada*. His married love for Véra Nabokov inspired "The Return of Chorb," the story of Fyodor and Zina in *The Gift*, the calm married love of the Shades in *Pale Fire*, and now the serenity of the Veens in old age.

In fact *Ada* as a whole reads like Nabokov's wish-fulfilment fantasy. For Van and Ada, the breathtaking shock of first love and the calm confidence of last love can be one and the same. They also have extraordinary intelligence, imagination, memory, sexual energy, physical prowess, material wealth, cultural capital, social status, even sheer longevity. The three languages Nabokov loved, Russian, French, and English, are spoken cosily together in a North America that blends European traditions, aristocratic privilege, magical summers on lush nineteenth-century family estates, with a modern freedom of sexual mores and easy democratic equality, as if America need no longer be only an émigré's haven, but can become a complete return to the Europe of Nabokov's childhood. Has he invented the enchantments Antiterra offers the Veens as vicarious treats for VN?

Ada and Van themselves exult in all their advantages and invite us to share their delight in themselves. But good readers balk at this. Has Nabokov simply created in his heroes little Nabokovs whose unattractive sides he cannot see? Joyce Carol Oates writes that Nabokov "assigns worth—which may seem to us quite exaggerated, even ludicrous, as in *Ada*—to a few selected human beings."[7] John Updike wonders "But is it intentional that . . . the hero is such a brute?"[8]

The perplexity of the critics drove Nabokov to reply. Far from seeing and spoiling Van and Ada as surrogate Nabokovs, he declared that he loathed Van Veen and that he was outraged that a reviewer could suppose there was any trace of Véra Nabokov in "bitchy and lewd" Ada (*SO* 120, 146). Countering objections to *Ada*'s apparent combination of complexity and caprice, he remarked: ". . . the main favor I ask of the serious critic is sufficient perceptiveness to understand that whatever term or trope I use, my purpose is not to be facetiously flashy or grotesquely obscure but to express what I feel and think with the utmost truthfulness and perception" (*SO* 179).

How does the evidence of the text stand up to Nabokov's claims and disclaimers outside it? At the beginning of part 1 chapter 10, Van reports, entranced, eleven-year-old Ada's precocious mealtime conversations. His interest in Ada has already been roused but still remains confined to a mutual

acknowledgement of intellectual kinship and on Van's part eager and (as he thinks) vain longing. Van and Ada conspire together to keep Marina, their mother (ostensibly only Van's aunt) from dominating the conversation with her boring reminiscences of her days as an actress:

> Van: "That yellow thingum" (pointing at a floweret prettily depicted on an Eckercrown plate) "—is it a buttercup?"
>
> Ada: "No. That yellow flower is the common Marsh Marigold, *Caltha palustris*. In this country, peasants miscall it 'Cowslip,' though of course the true Cowslip, *Primula veris*, is a different plant altogether."
>
> "I see," said Van.
>
> "Yes, indeed," began Marina, "when I was playing Ophelia, the fact that I had once collected flowers—"
>
> "Helped, no doubt," said Ada. "Now the Russian word for marsh marigold is *Kuroslep* (which muzhiks in Tartary misapply, poor slaves, to the buttercup) or else *Kaluzhnitsa*, as used quite properly in Kaluga, U.S.A."
>
> "Ah," said Van.
>
> "As in the case of many flowers," Ada went on, with a mad scholar's quiet smile, "the unfortunate French name of our plant, *souci d'eau*, has been traduced or shall we say transfigured—"
>
> "Flowers into bloomers," punned Van Veen.
>
> "*Je vous en prie, mes enfants!*" put in Marina, who had been following the conversation with difficulty and now, through a secondary misunderstanding, thought the reference was to the undergarment.
>
> "By chance, this very morning," said Ada, not deigning to enlighten her mother, "our learned governess, who was also yours, Van, and who—"
>
> (First time she pronounced it—at that botanical lesson!)
>
> "—is pretty hard on English-speaking transmongrelizers—monkeys called 'ursine howlers'—though I suspect her reasons are more chauvinistic than artistic and moral—drew my attention—my wavering attention—to some really gorgeous bloomers, as you call them, Van, in a Mr. Fowlie's *soi-disant* literal version—called 'sensitive' in a recent Elsian rave—sensitive!—of *Mémoire*, a poem by Rimbaud (which she fortunately—and farsightedly—made me learn by heart, though I suspect she prefers Musset and Coppée)"—
>
> ". . . *les robes vertes et déteintes des fillettes* . . ." quoted Van triumphantly.
>
> "Egg-zactly" (mimicking Dan). "Well, Larivière allows me to read him only in the Feuilletin anthology, the same you have apparently, but I shall obtain his *oeuvres complètes* very soon, oh very soon, much sooner than anybody thinks. Incidentally, she will come down after tucking in Lucette, our darling copperhead who by now should be in her green nightgown—"
>
> "*Angel moy*," pleaded Marina, "I'm sure Van cannot be interested in Lucette's nightdress!"
>
> "—the nuance of willows, and counting the little sheep on her *ciel de lit* which Fowlie turns into 'the *sky's bed*' instead of 'bed ceiler.' But, to go back to our poor flower. The forged *louis d'or* in that collection of fouled French is the transformation of *souci d'eau* (our marsh marigold) into the asinine

> 'care of the water'—although he had at his disposal dozens of synonyms, such as mollyblob, marybud, maybubble, and many other nicknames assocated with fertility feasts, whatever those are." (63–65)

Van knows nothing about taxonomy and feeds a question to Ada to give her a chance to show off. Which she does, reducing him to a helpless "I see," a comically numbed "Ah." Marina tries to turn the conversation her way, but her sentence is crisply completed and her way curtly blocked by her daughter, and we agree we would rather not hear out the old bore. As Ada switches from the marsh marigold's name to its mistranslation from the French, Van perks up. Here he can relax, here he can play the game (and in fact he later shows himself a much better translator from the French than Ada), here he can throw in a pun of his own, while Marina shows herself even more helplessly out of her depth than ever. A sudden aside from Van in excited retrospect ("'who was also yours, Van, and who—' [First time she pronounced it—at that botanical lesson!]") intensifies our anticipation, only for it to be buried in the torrent of Ada's talk.

This would be one of the thirty or so most difficult passages in *Ada*. Ada inundates us with masses of recondite information, all perfectly accurate, and she certainly enjoys her ability to dazzle Van and to talk over her mother's head. As readers, we could respond with irritation that Ada is obviously so much brighter than we were at eleven. Or we could respond to her mental powers with as much pleasure and amused awe as we did to stories of Pippi Longstocking's or Popeye's special physical powers. Because there is certainly an element of the fabulous here that mingles oddly—to my taste rather piquantly—with the pedantry.

And even the pedantry is fun. Ada's speech is simply so colorful ("*Kuroslep* [which muzhiks in Tartary misapply, poor slaves, to the buttercup]"), so mobile, so opinionated, so cocky, that it should amuse those who don't fear that someone else's magical brilliance is a put-down of their own prosaic powers (I wonder if people who react this way can read Sherlock Holmes?) or that they should know everything Ada happens to know.

Nabokov of course does not expect readers to know all Ada knows. That is the very point of the scene's humor and its drama. He manages to create scenes like this throughout *Ada*, where we may not know every (or even any) reference, but where the sheer flashing speed and bright detail easily compensates for the obscurity, and where we nevertheless readily understand the human drama, as we can enjoy here the interplay between Marina, Van, and Ada: Marina's doomed attempts to control and direct, Van's avid amazement and his eagerness to show he can keep up with Ada whenever her topic allows him a chance, Ada's vivid delight in herself and her easy condescension to American peasants, Tartar muzhiks, her mother, her French governess, the translator Mr. Fowlie, the critic Elsie du Nord, her father, in fact to everybody but Van.

But if Nabokov does not expect us to know everything here, he makes it possible for us to find out, and he makes it worth the effort. He criticized Joyce

for the obscurity of the local referents in *Ulysses*, and he avoids them himself. He refers not to arcane ephemera or *Thom's Dublin Directory* but to a masterpiece of European literature, Rimbaud's "*Mémoire*," and by this and allusions elsewhere in the novel prompts us to read or reread it.

If we do, we will understand the weird looping aside Ada makes after Van's triumphant quotation from "*Mémoire*" ("*les robes vertes et déteintes des fillettes*," "the green faded dresses of girls"). Politer to Van than to her mother, Ada acknowledges his interruption, which at least is pertinent, but maintains her own momentum on the subject of Mlle Larivière. As she continues, she recalls Van's line, and the green that her younger sister, red-headed Lucette, always wears, and responds belatedly with an impeccably controlled aside on "Lucette, our darling copperhead who by now should be in her green nightgown" that ends as she had planned, regardless of Marina's interruption, with an echo of the next phrase in Rimbaud's poem, "the nuance of willows."[9] Tracing Rimbaud's text allows us to savor another literary masterpiece in its own right, and to appreciate better details in *Ada* such as, here, the psychology behind rapid speech, and the comedy of Ada's impatient brilliance.

Nabokov also names the translator of Rimbaud's poem, whom he wishes to take to task for what are in fact quite astonishing blunders, if we take the trouble to check. As Ada points out, the worst "bloomer" of all in Wallace Fowlie's translation is his rendering the phrase *souci d'eau* not as "marsh marigold" but word by word as "care of the water," and so robbing the poem of a flower.[10]

We can check in dictionaries that the marsh marigold may be called "cowslip" in the United States, or *kuroslep* or *kaluzhnitsa* in Russian, or *souci d'eau* in French. And we can also find that "mayblob" or "marybud" are names for, respectively, marsh marigold and marigold. Why then does Nabokov have Ada list "mollyblob, marybud, maybubble" as alternatives Fowlie could have used to translate *souci d'eau*?

This time the answer cannot be searched for. But anyone who knows *Ulysses* has the clue, and its precision confirms its correctness, as solutions to Nabokovian problems so often do. The suggestion of popping in "maybubble" combines with "mollyblob" to point unmistakably to Molly Bloom's famous musing on the blob of a ruptured hymen: "and they always want to see a stain on the bed to know youre a virgin for them . . . theyre such fools too you could be a widow or divorced 40 times over a daub of red ink would do or blackberry juice no thats too purply."[11]

For those who haven't read *Ulysses*, another route is possible—and again, this provision of multiple pathways to discovery is a standard Nabokovian tactic, a safeguard, a confirmation, and a reflection of the manysidedness of fact in the real world. The "*d'or* . . . transformation . . . marigold . . . asinine" at the beginning of the same sentence subliminally evokes the title of the Latin novel, the *Metamorphoses* (or *Transformations*)[12] or *The Golden Ass*. In Apuleius's novel, Lucius is transformed into an ass, and what it takes to make him whole

again is to eat a rose. A flower in Fowlie's translation would turn the asinine transformation back to the original; or, in the terms of the Joyce allusion, Fowlie has "deflowered" Rimbaud's poem.

Now even Ada for all her brilliance cannot be aware of these allusions, speaking as she is spontaneously and at speed. Why then does Nabokov go to such trouble to align the loss of Rimbaud's *souci d'eau* with this stress on deflowering?

The answer lies in Ada's aside on Lucette. As Annapaola Cancogni comments, "in so far as Lucette habitually wears green, the line and the girl remain associated throughout the novel, and the poem."[13] And not only that. The tragedy of Lucette's fate is that she commits suicide after she fails to convince Van to deflower her. Entangled in the romance of Van and Ada, she becomes obsessed with Van, partly in response to his immediate charms, partly in imitation of her big sister, partly because their frenzied lovemaking awakens her too early to sex, partly because Van and Ada find it convenient to play on Lucette's adoration of Van, partly because the sex-mad Ada stokes her physical fires in other ways—and in short because Van and Ada are simply too obsessed with themselves to pay any attention to Lucette in her own right until she is dead and irrecoverable.

Lucette's whole emotional development has been skewed by her being sexually "initiated" far too young. The tragic irony of her fate is that she loses her innocence at too early an age but remains a virgin and cannot get Van to take the virginity she so desperately offers. She commits suicide by drowning; because she is not deflowered, she becomes in a ghoulish sense "the care of the water."[14]

Lucette's death is the central tragedy of the novel, and something Ada and especially Van belatedly try to accept responsibility for; but until her death she is overlooked or dismissed—not only by Van and Ada, but also by us as readers—as only a troublesome impediment to Van and Ada's ardor.

But Nabokov never overlooks her. He has called her "my favorite child."[15] He makes this little girl slighted by Van and Ada central to the novel,[16] and he makes her entanglement in Van and Ada's fate stand for all human responsibility for those we are close to. No matter how much Van and Ada may celebrate their self-sufficiency, their triumphant apartness from others, they cannot escape their interdependence. They cannot enjoy the benefits of their intimate connections with each other—the magic of love that they celebrate so eloquently—without paying the moral price of responsibility exacted for the very possibility of human interconnectedness.[17]

In order to see that Lucette is central to *Ada*, despite Van and Ada's focus on their own story, it is not necessary to discover the barbs Nabokov has grafted onto the *souci d'eau*/Joyce/Apuleius allusions in Ada's botanical talk. Nabokov establishes Lucette's key role in many other ways: through other, simpler allusions (such as to Rimbaud's "*Mémoire*," itself, whose brookside setting as we will see interacts with a key brookside scene in *Ada* that foreshadows

Lucette's death); through other patterns within *Ada*, such as the Chateaubriand-incest pattern, which if examined closely can be seen to focus on Lucette;[18] even, for good enough readers, by simply watching how Van and Ada and Lucette behave, and refusing to be swayed by Van and Ada's rhetorical ardor as storytellers.

When we discover the more arcane networks of meaning that bypass Van and Ada's control and privilege Lucette (and, by association with her, others whom Van and Ada mistreat),[19] we can see that Nabokov is far from standing uncritically behind Van and Ada's pride in their exceptional abilities. In fact one of his key points in the novel is that despite their gifts (and because of them) Van and Ada become dangerously self-centered and thoughtless towards others, just as Ada behaves heartlessly in that dinnertime conversation towards her mother. Having assessed her mother as boring, Ada simply humiliates her. Lucette, by contrast, on her last night alive, despite having managed to stir Van's desire, stops at this crucial juncture of her life to offer "her last, last, last free gift of staunch courtesy" towards "old bores of the family" (490, 475)—and by allowing time for Van to dispel the sexual pressure she has applied, she inadvertently seals her own doom.

Obsessed with their own brilliance, Van and Ada relegate Lucette to the periphery. But Nabokov never does. *Ada* opens with a mangled echo of the opening of *Anna Karenin*. Despite his disclaimer, Van quotes the Tolstoy mistranslation to imply that we are about to read the story of a unique happy family. But Anna Karenin takes her own life, and Lucette, as she lurches to her death, thinks in a jumbled stream of consciousness that recalls Anna's stream of consciousness on the way to her death. Still within the novel's opening lines, Nabokov points to the same implication another way: the mistranslation theme sounded so insistently here looks forward to the climax of the theme, the *souci d'eau* passage and its striking anticipation of Lucette's death. Van's implication that we are broaching the story of a happy family needs to be radically qualified.

Ada's last sentence begins with similar blitheness: "Not the least adornment of the chronicle is the delicacy of pictorial detail: a latticed gallery; a painted ceiling; a pretty plaything stranded among the forget-me-nots of a brook" (589). Over the course of the novel, three things have in fact ended up stranded in that brook: a watch, hardly a plaything in a novel so preoccupied with Time; a condom, an awkward necessity in a novel also preoccupied with sex; and Lucette's rubber doll, which Ada has "had the bad taste" to perforate with a vaginal slit. Lucette fills the doll with water by the brook's edge, and squeezes it out again in fascination. Before long, the doll gets swept away, Van sheds his pants to retrieve it, and intemperate Ada, stirred by the sight, pretends she is a dragon, has Van tie Lucette up "so that Van might save her just in time. For some reason, Lucette balked at the notion but physical strength prevailed. Van and Ada left the angry captive firmly attached to a willow trunk, and, 'prancing' to feign swift escape and pursuit, disappeared for

a few precious minutes in the dark grove of the conifers." Eight-year-old Lucette unties herself and for the first time spies on them as they make love, before returning and tying herself up again as best she can (143). Some time later, the doll does get washed away again, a grim memento of Lucette's first initiation and of her ultimate fate at the bottom of the sea. And for the reader of "*Mémoire*," the whole brookside scene and especially the doll and the willow under which Lucette is tied will recall the "*jouet*" (plaything) and the "*saules*" ("willows") of Rimbaud's last stanza, and so will bring to mind Ada's dinnertime talk, and will all the more readily evoke at *Ada*'s close the complex ironies of Lucette's fate.

Ada brings together all that has mattered most to Nabokov: the countries and languages and literatures he loves; first love and last love and family love; memory and time; art and science, art and life; the riches of consciousness, the loss of these riches in death, the possibility of a world beyond loss. And proof of its proximity, if not to the literal details of his personal past, at least to the things he treasured, can be seen in the fact that one of *Ada*'s central motifs, Chateaubriand's line "*Du château qui baignait la Dore*," was Nabokov's suggestion for the French title of his own autobiography.[20]

But this does not make *Ada* indulgent wish-fulfilment. In fact, if anything the novel is Nabokov's most rigorous testing of himself, his most ruthless exorcism of his own weaknesses. He has always valued his originality, been conscious of his genius and proud of his difference from others, enjoyed a high and rich culture, been exclusive in his affections and protective towards those closest to him. In Van and Ada he first intensifies these qualities and allows them their full scope in his characters' command over their own means of expression, then criticizes them by means of their overt behavior and, to counter their own self-delighted rhetoric, by means of covert networks of internal and external allusion.[21]

Not that this makes *Ada* personal therapy. Nabokov admired Emerson, and would have agreed with his dictum: "to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius."[22] All of us value our sense of difference from other people, the unique perspective of our own consciousness, the few who are closest to us. By inveigling us as readers to adopt Van and Ada's position,[23] to ignore the Lucette who stands outside their interests, he tests us as he has himself.

Far from making *Ada* a ready mix of memory and desire, Nabokov designed the novel as his most radical dismantling and reassembling of his world. He even creates for the novel its own world, Antiterra, with a complex, teasing relation to ours, and makes his hero a philosopher. Let us consider *Ada* in terms of philosophy's traditional divisions.

First, logic. As a lepidopterist intrigued by problems of taxonomy, Nabokov had long been concerned with notions of relationship, of identity,

resemblance and difference. In *Ada* the interest in relationship begins before the first sentence, in the chart of relationships set out in the family tree, and expands in the first chapter, with its investigations into the familial relationship between Van and Ada and the eerie hints, in their first speeches, of their uncanny resemblance ("'I deduce,' said the boy, 'three main facts: that . . . ; that . . . ; and that . . .' 'I can add,' said the girl, 'that . . . ; that . . . ; and that . . .'" [8]). Even the first lines of the novel focus on ideas of resemblance and difference, in a text that curiously resembles and differs from Tolstoy's, and is said to have "little if any relation to the story to be unfolded now, a family chronicle."

One key reason for *Ada*'s subverting the notion of a nineteenth-century family chronicle and assigning such prominence to incest may become apparent if we listen to Wittgenstein on the complexities of relationship: "we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing; sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail. . . . I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way."[24]

Antiterra raises the problem of relationship in another way. In hundreds of details it resembles and yet minutely differs from our earth, which may or may not be the same as the Terra some Antiterrans believe in as "another world," a "Next World" (20). Van notes: "There were those who maintained that the discrepancies and 'false overlapping' between the two worlds were too numerous, and too deeply woven into the skein of successive events, not to taint with trite fancy the theory of essential sameness; and there were those who retorted that the dissimilarities only confirmed the live organic reality pertaining to the other world; that a perfect likeness would rather suggest a specular, and hence speculatory, phenomenon" (18–19). Others come to believe in "the secret Government-concealed identity of Terra and Antiterra" (582).

Nabokov's investigation of the nature of relationship shows up in *Ada*'s characterization (the strange similarities between Van and Ada, the confusions and overlappings of Lucette and Ada, the Veen children's complex inheritances from their parents and grandparents), its setting (Antiterra), its events (the more or less eerie repetitions of Ardis the First and Ardis the Second, or of picture-hatted women in bars, or of love-making "from behind"),[25] its allusions (their play on the relationship between original and copy, in translation, in adaptation, in parody; their strange blurrings of the relationship between art and life) and its language (the wildly centrifugal sentences that turn out at other levels to lead back to the book's center). *Ada* swarms far more densely than any other Nabokov novel with patterns of every kind. A seemingly simple exchange between Greg Erminin and Ada—"I guess it's your father under that oak, isn't it?" "No, it's an elm," said Ada (92)—though

immediately amusing also forms part of five different recurring patterns whose ramifying relationships prove as difficult to trace as Nabokov the lepidopterist found nature's own patterns.[26]

Second, epistemology. For Nabokov the logical and the epistemological overlap. Identity and relationship are never fixed and final; more can always be discovered, a new individuating detail, a hitherto unsuspected connection. Nabokov's sense of the difficulty and delights of his discoveries as a scientist are reflected in *Ada*, more than in any other of his novels, by the varying ways he imparts and withholds and disguises information, by his overloading us, distracting us, requiring us to link one seemingly offhand scrap of fact with another.[27] Once again, *Ada*'s opening chapter, with its extraordinary upending of the conventions of exposition that appears to conceal rather than disclose the necessary information, but ends up by revealing far more than any other expository scene, reflects from the first Nabokov's attention to the frustrations and frissons of apprehending our world.[28] And at another level the mystery that for Antiterrans surrounds Terra—and our equal inability to determine whether Terra is in fact our planet, or whether Antiterra itself is not earth as distorted in the prism of Van's mind—serves at a more comic and cosmic level to remind us "that man being within nature, there cannot be any independent explanation of what we do and of the world in which we do it."[29]

Third, ethics. In considering Lucette's centrality to *Ada*, we have already seen how Nabokov turns Van's and Ada's responsibility towards Lucette's entanglement in their fates into an index of all human interconnectedness. In Van and Ada he shows the moral myopia possible even in people blessed with a capacity for tenderness and sensitivity, as he compares their treatment of Lucette with their infidelities to each other, their adulteries, their hypocrisies, their exploitations, their cruelties. I have dealt with this topic at length, at too great length perhaps, in *Nabokov's Ada*. Not that I overstated there the seriousness of Nabokov's moral concern in *Ada*, but in focussing on it so intently I may have obscured the novel's other tones and themes. In my eagerness to apportion responsibility, I also underemphasized what escaped a moral reckoning, the inextricability of the situation that had evolved, the sheer potential tragedy in things, by the time Lucette's death was imminent. Even when Van tries to act with a kind of wavering restraint (too late, of course), that only precipitates Lucette's final doom.

I must also confess I cannot confidently determine the degree to which Nabokov wishes to indicate that Van is deliberately trying to atone for Lucette's death in writing *Ada*. Van's case is quite different from Humbert's. Humbert happily nurtured for years his intent to kill Lolita's abductor and, when the murder fails to purge his bitterness, sets about writing Lolita to continue his campaign against Quilty and his own self-defense. He writes his memoir at speed, and is therefore presumably not responsible for many of *Lolita*'s submerged patterns. But Van reworks *Ada* for ten years, and does sincerely regret Lucette's death, and to some extent the behavior that led to it.

Does the stream of consciousness he invents for Lucette in the scene of her death, a deliberate echo of *Anna Karenin*, link up *for him* with the opening quotation of Tolstoy's novel, in a belated attempt to reassert Lucette's importance at the very outset of the novel? Is the "plaything" in the last sentence, with its echo of "*Mémoire*," a last act of contrition?

Fourth, metaphysics. As a philosopher, Van tackles the subject of the link between space and time, and the nature and texture of time. As a memoirist, with Nabokov's help, he creates three powerfully counterpointed rhythms of time throughout the whole book: a kind of transcending of time in Van's early love for Ada, their endless replaying, even within Ardis the First, of their new young love, their anticipating their future recollection ("My sister, do you still recall / The blue Ladore and Ardis Hall?" [138]), their replaying in Ardis the Second the happiness of their first summer together; the disintegration of that sense of timelessness, the assertion of time's decay, later in Ardis the Second, as Ada's infidelity becomes more and more inescapable, despite her denials, and in the rest of the novel, as the Parts shrink and the gaps in time between them lengthen horribly, as if Van and Ada's love has some alarmingly short half-life, as if the arrow of immortal love at Ardis has become the arrow (Greek *ardis*, "point of an arrow" [225]) of Time; and then the triumph of a reversal of Time's direction, as Van and Ada in middle age reestablish their love together, and, as their bodies decay toward death, retell together the story of their love, in a way that permeates the account of their first summer together and gives it even there a sense of another kind of triumph over Time.

When Van is separated from Ada, however—and that is most of his life—he has to obtund the pain of her absence by immersing himself in his work. As a psychologist and philosopher, he studies the madmen who believe in the existence of Terra, which to some seems like a kind of Next World. As a writer of "physics fiction" (339), too (his *Letters from Terra*, which draws on his psychological researches), he feels he has to know what, according to Nabokov, professional physicists are reluctant to discuss: what lies on "the outside of the inside" (*SM* 301)—exactly, in other words, what we know as "meta-physics." But of course even madness or the possibility of another world hardly permits us to see from beyond the world of human consciousness. Yet Nabokov has woven within the novel a network of hints that, in ways Van cannot see, the dead Lucette seems to have influenced Van and Ada's lives—especially at the crucial moment when their last reunion appeared to have failed—and to be sending them now "letters from Terra," signals from a region beyond mortal time, signals which may even have inspired Van to write *Ada*, but which for all his attempts to "catch sight of the lining of time" (227) remain beyond his ken.[30]

Fifth, aesthetics. From the start, from its echo of *Anna Karenin*, *Ada* draws on prior art. With its parodic homage to the tradition of the novel, with Van and Ada's obsessive omnidirectional allusiveness and their adopting lines from Marvell, Chateaubriand and Rimbaud as personal refrains, *Ada*

could serve as a one-text course in intertextuality. Works-within-the-work reflect the novel's outer story and often works-without-the-work in a succession of mises-en-abîme (Marina's travesty of *Eugene Onegin* in her performance in *Eugene and Lara*; Mlle Larivière's unintentionally comic *Les Enfants Maudits*, which echoes both Chateaubriand's *Mémoires* and his *René* and, despite her unobservant nature, the evolving story of Van and Ada; Van's doomed attempt to keep thoughts of Ada at bay in *Letters from Terra*; the complex tragic farce of Ada's film *Don Juan's Last Fling*, with its absurd echoes of *Don Quixote* and Pushkin's Don Juan mini-drama, *The Stone Guest*). Scenes freeze or frieze into tableaux from more or less famous works of art (a Parmigianino drawing,[31] a Toulouse-Lautrec poster,[32] a Bosch painting,[33] or various opulent hybrids). *Ada* explores the relation between one art and another (painting, literature, architecture, drama, film), between art and science (Ada's watercolors of invented orchids, Lucette's discoveries of Old Master butterflies), between artistic creativity and amatory energy (*passim*), between art and sport (Van's role as Mascodagama makes him a sort of *acrobate maudit* whose rapture "derived from overcoming gravity was akin to that of artistic revelation. . . . Van on the stage was performing organically what his figures of speech were to perform later in life—acrobatic wonders that had never been expected from them and which frightened children" [185]), between art and games (Ada's sun-and-shade games, Russian Scrabble, Van's sleight-of-hand at cards), between art and life. The gap between Terra and Antiterra may after all be read at one level as a book-length metaphor for the autonomy of the world of a book, for the perhaps uncrossable boundary between art and life, for the special Time of the world of art, for the riddle of whether art reflects or distorts or explains life by standing so far apart from it or by matching it so well.

Ada is Nabokov's *summa*. But although analyzing it according to the traditional divisions of philosophy provides some measure of the book's comprehensiveness, it is not the kind of dissection the novel itself immediately invites. In *Ada* everything intertwines, and on Nabokov's own terms. The novel offers a succession of parodies of paradise, an examination of the human desire for perfect happiness that must face up to the innate imperfections of a life shadowed by loss. *Ada*'s trouble-free Antiterra collapses back into our troublesome twentieth-century Terra; Van and Ada's Ardis is a parody paradise, they themselves a new Adam and Eve; their flawed paradise is itself parodied in Eric Veen's Villa Venuses, where a dream of sexual sublimity and opulent exclusiveness ends in rank corruption, or in the "sacred secret and creed" constructed by "romantically inclined handmaids" (409). Or *Ada* celebrates and criticizes the *roman*, "romance," romanticism: the fairy-tale roots of the novel as a genre, and its tangled foliage of fact; its distance from and dependence on myths of love, like those of Venus, which the Veens embody and dismantle; the transcendent impulse behind romantic love and

romantic literature, and the matching dangers of romantic egotism. Or it could be seen as a study of the ironies of originality, a novel that asserts its own originality the moment its first line copies another, and then evokes the breathless, unprecedented newness of falling in love—in a world already dense with allusion and echo, a decadent endgame Eden.[34] Or . . .

Brian Boyd

NOTES

1. *Ada*, 1969. The Vintage edition (1990) has a corrected text and Nabokov's "Notes to *Ada* by Vivian Darkbloom."
2. McCarthy, 1971.
3. Note that Nabokov does not call *Ada* the pearl of English literature: he does not think he could take on Joyce, let alone Shakespeare.
4. Updike, 1969, p. 68.
5. See Boyd, "Annotations to *Ada*," part of an ongoing series.
6. Alter, 1979, p. 112.
7. Oates, 1973, p. 37.
8. Updike, 1969, p. 70.
9. The Rimbaud line is "*font les saules*" ("make willows").
10. Fowlie corrected this and other blunders (in Fowlie, 1946, pp. 76–78) in a later translation (Fowlie, 1966, p. 123) that Nabokov did not see.
11. Joyce, 1986 (Harmondsworth: Penguin), p. 633 (18:1125).
12. Nabokov referred to Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* both as *Metamorphosis*, its usual title in translation, and as *Transformation*.
13 Cancogni, 1985, p. 218.
14. Cf. Boyd, 1985, pp. 34–40, 102–03.
15. Interview with Bernard Pivot, "Apostrophes," May 30, 1975, from TS, Vladimir Nabokov Archives.
16. Credit for first seeing the centrality of Lucette should go to Bobbie Ann Mason (Mason, 1974). Unfortunately Mason's terms for affirming Lucette at the expense of Van and Ada (Lucette's "natural" red coloring and green clothing versus Ada's "unnatural" looks, dark hair and pale pigmentation) do not carry the moral charge she implies, and require the kind of symbolic reading of colors that Nabokov consistently objected to. Mason would have done better to trace the networks of implication that Nabokov linked to Van and Ada's behavior. She also overstates Ada's and especially Van's callousness as narrators towards Lucette.
17. This is the theme of Boyd, 1985, pp. 91–161.
18. Cf. Boyd, 1985, pp. 104–07.
19. Cf. Boyd, 1985, Chs. 9–10, "Lucette and Others."
20. Unpublished VN letter to Doussia Ergaz, October 30, 1951, Vladimir Nabokov Archive. Interestingly, *Ada* was hailed in its French version as "le plus beau livre de souvenirs depuis Proust et Chateaubriand" ("the finest book of memoirs [!] since Proust and Chateaubriand"; *L'Exprès*, June 9–15, 1975).
21. Nabokov revised *Speak, Memory* between November 1965 and January 1966, between the first flash of the story of Van and Ada (November 1965) and the discovery in

February 1966 of the way of integrating that story with his "Texture of Time" and "Letters from Terra" projects, on which he had been working intermittently since 1959. *Speak, Memory* therefore fed into the romance of Van and Ada in important ways; and Nabokov's strategy of undermining his elegiac nostalgists may have been influenced by his unease (expressed in a letter I cannot for the moment relocate) that he came across as rather too precious and self-satisfied in *Speak, Memory*.

22. From the opening paragraph of "Self-Reliance" (Emerson, 1883, p. 37).
23. By the late 1960s, especially after the 1967 republication of *Speak, Memory* for a wide audience, Nabokov could make special use of readers' knowledge of his past, his pursuits and his opinions to invite us to commit the mistake of identifying Van and Ada with himself and ourselves with Van and Ada.
24. Wittgenstein, 1962, p. 32e.
25. Boyd, 1985, pp. 109–23.
26. Boyd, 1979, pp. 80–84.
27. Cf. Boyd, 1985, pp. 23–45, for the epistemological implications of *Ada*'s style.
28. Cf. Boyd, 1991, pp. 542–51.
29. Nabokov, "Prof. Woodbridge" [Review]. Nabokov here summarizes with approval Woodbridge's "major assumption."
30. This is the theme of Boyd, 1985, pp. 169–205.
31. See Boyd, "L'Art et l'ardeur d'Ada."
32. Boyd, 1985, pp. 109–11.
33. Mason, 1974, pp. 160–62.
34. *Ada* could in this sense be read as a book-length study of the "mimetic desire"—desire, especially romantic or sexual, as something provoked in imitation of desire in others—that René Girard finds pervasive in the novel (1965) and other genres (1991). Nabokov explores this in psychological terms (Van's imitation of the sexual conduct of his father and of his older schoolmates; Ada's of the romantic figures she has read about in the Ardis library; Lucette's of Van and Ada; Blanche's of the figures she has read about in *Les Amours du Docteur Mertvago*, of the other servants, of Van and Ada; Eric Veen's of his adolescent reading) and in terms of both the Venus and the Edenic myths he invokes, and in the tension between the shock of love's initial novelty and the eventual recognition of love's ceaseless repetitions.

ANIA V STRANE CHUDES

When Nabokov translated Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1922,[1] he was not the first to attempt to render Carroll's unique work in Russian. According to N.M. Demurova, the earliest Russian translation of the tale appeared in Moscow under the title *Sonia v tsarstve diva* (*Sonia in the Kingdom of Wonder*) in 1879, although neither the author's nor the translator's name was given.[2] Other translations completed before 1917 were those of Poliksena Sergeevna Solov'eva (using the pseudonym "Allegro") for the journal *Tropinka* in 1909 and of A.N. Rozhdestvenskaia (no date given).[3]

Nabokov's version came out in 1923. The same year saw the appearance of another Russian variant by A. D'Aktil' (pseudonym of Anatoly Frenkel'), and since that time there have been a number of translations and paraphrasings of Carroll's work in the Soviet Union.[4] Of all of these, Nabokov's version is one of the most ingenious and delightful.

Nabokov may have been familiar with Solov'eva's translation.[5] Solov'eva handled the difficult problem of Russianizing Carroll's parodic renditions of well-known, pedantic English poems by creating new poems which take as their models not English works but famous Russian verses. For example, when Carroll's Caterpillar asks Alice to recite "You are old, Father William," and Alice produces a humorous parody of Robert Southey's poem, we find that Solov'eva's Caterpillar asks Alice to recite lines from Pushkin's long narrative poem *Poltava*. Evaluating this passage, Efim Etkind finds it fatally flawed: how could a very English Alice be so knowledgeable about Pushkin's poetry? He concludes by saying that although Carroll's work is a fantasy, "his heroine, from the first line to the last, remains an English girl."[6]

Perhaps Nabokov was aware of the inherent implausibility of a young English girl knowing by heart some lines of Pushkin. Faced with this contradiction, he moved a decisive step beyond Solov'eva: he made Alice a young *Russian* girl named Ania, and he worked a wholesale transformation of characters and contexts, substituting Russian names and backgrounds for English ones. Indeed, while Nabokov's work can loosely be called a "translation" (*perevod*), it should perhaps be more properly called an "adaptation" or "transposition" (*perelozhenie*).[7] When Carroll's Mouse tells a "dry" tale about William the Conquerer (p. 16), Nabokov provides his Mouse with an equally dry tale about the problems of succession following the death of Vladimir Monomakh (p. 22). The sum of one hundred pounds (p. 14) becomes one thousand rubles (p. 19); shillings and pence (p. 85) are converted to kopecks (p. 101); the command to "Speak English!" (p. 16) becomes a command to "Speak Russian" (p. 23).

Character names undergo analogous transformations. As Alice becomes Ania, so, too, her friends' names change from Ada and Mabel (p. 10) to Ada and Asia (pronounced "Asya" p. 15). A similar shift occurs in the Dormouse's story about the "three little sisters"—Elsie, Lacie, and Tillie (p. 54). As Martin Gardner has pointed out, the three "little" sisters are actually the three "Liddell" sisters, and each of the fictional names provides a coded reference to the girl's real name (e.g. "Elsie" stands for "L.C."—Lorina Charlotte).[8] Nabokov was probably unaware of this fact, and his version makes use of sound repetition as a formative principle in the creation of the girls' names: Masia, Pasia, and Dasia (p. 64). He therefore unknowingly loses the chance to toy with one of his favorite devices in naming—the anagram—for "Lacie" is an anagram of the name Alice itself! On the other hand, some of his transformations sparkle in their own right. The lizard named Bill (p. 28) becomes Iashka-Iashcheritsa ("lizard"), adding a spirited sound repetition to the text (p. 36).

More impressive than his Russification of names, however, is Nabokov's handling of Carroll's nonsense verse and verse parodies. Nabokov's knowledge of literature, his practice as a poet, and his own penchant for parody stood him in good stead as he confronted Carroll's work. Three examples should suffice. As Alice strives to establish for herself how much she has changed since falling into the rabbit-hole, she tries to recite a didactic poem by Isaac Watts entitled "Against Idleness and Mischief" ("How doth the little busy bee . . ."). Instead of reciting the proper words about the industriousness of the constructive bee, she finds herself reciting a work about a crocodile who welcomes little fishes with "gently smiling jaws!" (p. 11). Nabokov reproduces Carroll's subject matter, but he uses a different poetic model as the source for his parody. In place of Watts's work, which would surely be unknown to a Russian audience, he chooses some well-known lines from Pushkin's narrative poem *The Gypsies*—the song which begins "Ptichka bozhiia ne znaet / Ni zaboty, ni truda" ("God's little bird knows neither care nor toil"). As Carroll retains Watts's metrical scheme of alternating four-foot and three-foot iambic lines, so too Nabokov retains Pushkin's trochaic tetrameter: "Krokodilushka ne znaet / Ni zaboty, ni truda" ("The little crocodile knows neither care nor toil," p. 16). The disjuncture created in the reader's mind between Pushkin's lines about a carefree bird and Nabokov's lines about a carefree but carnivorous crocodile produces a most pleasant and humorous reaction.

A second instance of Nabokov's free-spirited approach to parody occurs when the Caterpillar asks Alice to recite "You are old, Father William" (p. 33). Carroll here parodies Robert Southey's didactic poem "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them." Nabokov's choice of a poetic model for Ania's recitation is unexpected but wryly apt: he selects Lermontov's poem "Borodino," which begins with a youth addressing an old man as in Southey's work and which features the old man's long-winded rhetoric throughout the piece. Again, Nabokov reproduces the subject matter of Carroll's parody, but he follows the meter and stanzaic structure of the Lermontov original.

One of the most humorous substitutions Nabokov works into his rendition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* occurs in his version of the poem which the Gryphon asks Alice to recite. In Carroll's work, the Gryphon commands Alice to repeat another of Isaac Watt's didactic works, "The Sluggard" ("'Tis the voice of the sluggard . . ."). As Alice begins the recitation, she finds her words coming out "very queer indeed": "'Tis the voice of the Lobster; I heard him declare / 'You have baked me too brown, I must sugar my hair.'" (p. 80). Searching for an appropriate Russian poem to serve as the basis for parody, Nabokov hit upon an unusual target—Pushkin's ballad "The Song of Prophetic Oleg" ("Pesn' o veshchem Olege"). The Russian original, which as D.S. Mirsky has pointed out, was "familiar to every Russian schoolboy,"[9] begins: "Kak nyne sbiraetsia veshchii Oleg / Otmstit' nerazumnym khozaram . . ." ("As prophetic Oleg now plans to take vengeance on the foolhardy Khazars . . ."). Nabokov's parody begins with a marvelous jolt: "Kak

dynia, vzduvaetsia veshchii Omar: / 'Menia, govorit on, ty brosila v zhar'" ("Like a melon, the prophetic Lobster swells up: 'You have, he says, thrown me into a fever'" p. 94). While echoing Pushkin's amphibrachic meter, Nabokov emulates Carroll's rhyme scheme, substituting rhymed couplets for Pushkin's sequences of alternating rhymes and rhymed couplets. Again, he captures the essence of Carroll's theme in the poem, but the tone of the poet's address to the Lobster resonates humorously with the portentous voice of the seer who speaks to Oleg in Pushkin's work.

The ingenuity of Nabokov's solution to the problem of verse parody finds a match in his approach to the numerous puns which pervade Carroll's text. In most cases, of course, it is impossible to reproduce precisely the pun found in the English text, but Nabokov sought to create apt equivalents wherever he could. An early example of a series of puns with which Nabokov had to wrestle involves an interchange between the Mouse and Alice in chapter 3. When the Mouse declares that his is a "long and sad tale," Alice visualizes his narrative in the form of a *tail.* Unable to duplicate this pun, Nabokov settles for a different kind of misunderstanding on the part of his heroine. Nabokov's Mouse announces that his story is "prost" ("simple"), but Ania thinks that he has said "khvost" ("tail"), thus preparing the way for her to visualize the narrative as a tail. Part way into the narrative, the Mouse reprimands Alice for not listening properly. Carroll's Alice denies this and says: "you had got to the fifth bend, I think?" The Mouse responds angrily: "I had *not*!", thus allowing Alice to cry out: "A knot! . . . Oh, do let me help to undo it!" (p. 20).

In rendering this exchange, Nabokov inserts two puns in place of Carroll's lone pun. Ania asks the Mouse whether it had reached the fifth bend, and Nabokov uses the word "pogib" to mean "bend." The Mouse, however, hears this as an incorrectly stressed form of the past tense of the verb meaning "to perish" and thus remonstrates: "no one has perished" ("nikto ne pogib"). It continues: "Now you have confused me," using the verb "sputat'" to mean "confuse" ("Vot Vy teper' menia sputali"). Since this verb also means "tangle," Ania now rushes forth with the same eagerness to "untangle" the Mouse that we find in the English original: "Akh, daite ia rasputaiu" ("Oh, let me untangle you" p. 27).

As the example of "prost"–"khvost" shows, Nabokov occasionally had to resort to using two different words which sound somewhat similar to approximate the effect of an English pun based on a homonym. He utilized this strategy when dealing with the Dormouse's story about the three sisters who lived at the bottom of a treacle-well. According to the Dormouse, they were learning to "draw." "What did they draw?" asks Alice. "Treacle," replies the Dormouse (p. 55). Here Alice is expecting a response based on the concept of "drawing" as an artistic activity, whereas the Dormouse intends the word "draw" to mean "extract." Later in the scene, however, the Dormouse reverts to the artistic connotation of the word "draw" and says that the girls were learning to draw "all manner of things—everything that begins with an M

—" (p. 56). To convey this play on words, Nabokov utilizes two words which contain similar sounds: "cherpat'" ("draw" in the sense of "extract") and "chertit'" ("draw" in the sense of "sketch"). He uses the first word in the initial exchange about drawing treacle (rendered as "sirop"—syrup), and then shifts to the second word in a sentence that reads "Oni uchilis' cherpat' i chertit'" ("They were learning to draw [extract] and to draw [sketch]" p. 66). Although this is not entirely successful as a pun, Nabokov uses sound repetition to achieve a smooth conceptual transition.

In a few places Nabokov fails to reproduce a pun found in Carroll's text. When Alice tries to impress the Duchess with her intelligence and declares that the earth takes twenty-four hours to turn "on its axis," the Duchess interrupts: "Talking of axes . . . chop off her head!" (p. 44). Nabokov's translation does not contain an equivalent of the "axis"–"axes" pun, and thus when Alice begins her commentary about the twenty-four-hour cycle, the Duchess's order to chop off her head seems less motivated than it does in Carroll's original. It may be worth noting here that one Russian translator finds a neat solution to this particular problem. Alice's discussion of time provides the pretext for the translator A. Shcherbakov to have Alice utter in a half-sentence: "Uzh vam-to pora by . . ." ("Well, you of all people should [know] by now . . ."). The Duchess hears the word for "axe"—*topor*—embedded in Alice's phrase and calls out: "Topora by, topora! . . . I sniat' s nee golovu!" ("An axe, an axe! . . . And off with her head!" p. 81).

In most cases, however, Nabokov manages to find distinctive equivalents for Carroll's puns. This is nowhere more evident than in his handling of the encounter between Alice and the Mock Turtle. (The name which Nabokov gives the Mock Turtle is itself noteworthy. He combines the words "cherepakha" ["turtle"] and "chepukha" ["nonsense"] to create a portmanteau word very much in the style of Carroll's own word-creations: "Chepupakha.") Unable to provide an exact equivalent for Carroll's pun involving the words "tortoise" and "taught us" (p. 73), Nabokov makes the Mock Turtle's schoolmaster an octopus ("sprut"), thereby allowing him to make a pun on the teacher's method of forcing the pupils to learn ("s prutikom"—"with a switch" p. 84).

Particularly remarkable are Nabokov's versions of the names of the subjects taught in the Mock Turtle's school. The basic course, according to Carroll's Turtle, included "Reeling and Writhing" ("reading and writing" p. 73). Nabokov deals with this untranslatable pun by switching the middle consonants in the Russian words for reading and writing ("chitat'" and "pisat'") to come up with a new pair of subjects: "chesat' i pitat'" ("scratching and feeding" p. 85). The play on the names of school subjects continues with Carroll creating the fanciful series "Drawling, Stretching, and Fainting in Coils" ("drawing, sketching, and painting in oils" p. 74). Picking up the activity indicated in Carroll's "Stretching," Nabokov has his Turtle speak of his exercises in gymnastics, and he utilizes the phonetic similarity between the Russian words for gymnastics and grammar ("gimnastika" and "grammatika")

to invent a marvelous new exercise which the Turtle calls "iazvitel'noe naklonenie" (p. 86). This word-collocation, which derives from the Russian name for the "indicative mood" ("iz"iavitel'noe naklonenie") in grammar, carries the literal meaning of "caustic inclination," with "inclination" suggesting either a physical or a psychological stance.

The conversation about school ends with a discussion about the length of time the pupils spent in class. Strangely enough, the pupils attended school for ten hours on the first day, and their time in school decreased by one hour with each successive day. While this point affords Carroll the opportunity to make a pun involving the noun "lesson" and the verb "to lessen" (p. 74), Nabokov elaborates on Carroll's premise and makes a two-stage pun. His Turtle states that what they received in school was not "uroki" ("lessons"), but "ukory" ("reproaches"). After the Turtle mentions the cycle of decreasing class hours, the Gryphon can now point out why the classes were called "ukory" and not "uroki." Utilizing a different Russian root (*korot*—"short" instead of *kor*—"reproach"), he states smugly that the classes "ukorachivalis'" ("grew shorter" p. 87).

Ania's encounter with the Turtle and the Gryphon involves several other puns as well, and Nabokov arrives at a number of good equivalents for Carroll's manipulation of fish names. While Carroll makes puns out of the concept of "whiting" one's shoes under the water (where shoes are made of "soles and eels" p. 78) and he plays with the near rhyme of "porpoise" and "purpose," Nabokov plays with such Russian words as "treska" ("cod") and "treskaetsia" ("cracks") and creates a humorous pun out of the word "prizrachnyi" ("spectral"). Hearing the Turtle speak of "prizrachnye gonki" (literally, "spectral races"), Ania asks why they are "prizrachnye." The Turtle responds: "Ottogo, chto priz rak vyigryvaet" ("Because the crayfish [*rak*] wins the prize [*priz*]" p. 92; the words *priz* and *rak* combine to form the word for "specter"—*prizrak*).

Nabokov's translation of Carroll's classic not only shines because of his success at reproducing the scintillating effect of the English author's puns and word play, it also evinces a consistent fidelity to the tone of the original. Although one finds occasional lapses and omissions in the Russian text, these often receive compensation in minor emendations that sustain and broaden the overall thrust of Carroll's work. When Carroll's Pigeon speaks "in a tone of the deepest contempt" (p. 38), Nabokov uses sound repetition to come up with an excellent verb and adverb combination: "prezritel'no proshipel Golub'" ("hissed the Pigeon contemptuously" p. 47). Occasionally, Nabokov rounds out narrative passages with insertions that add color or richness to a scene. Examples of this include a description of the blue wallpaper in a room in the White Rabbit's house (p. 30); this does not appear in the original text. Similarly, Nabokov enhances Carroll's spare description of the kitchen at the Duchess's house. Carroll's account says merely that the room "was full of smoke from one end to the other" (p. 42); Nabokov's version notes that the room was "splosh' otumanennoi edkim dymom" ("entirely befogged with acrid

smoke" p. 51). On the whole, Nabokov's rendering does a fine job in capturing the spirit of Carroll's original, and although the later Nabokov strove as a translator to create more literal and scholarly translations than this work provides, it compares quite favorably with the majority of Russian versions which have succeeded it.

One may ask whether it is possible to see in this text the outlines of elements that later attain prominence in Nabokov's original fiction. Certainly the predilection for verbal play, punning, and sound repetition which one finds here is familiar to readers of Nabokov's other works. Readers may also detect in this work some thematic material which Nabokov's fiction later develops. The elusive boundary between illusion and reality which is invoked here will crop up in numerous works by Nabokov, and the realization by Alice's sister that the dream of Wonderland "would change to dull reality" when she opens her eyes (p. 97) anticipates the discovery of several of Nabokov's protagonists, such as Anton Petrovich in "An Affair of Honor" and the narrator of *The Eye*. One is also struck by the pangs of longing Alice feels when she looks through the small door leading to a fabulous garden and feels the pull to go "there" ("tuda") out of her gloomy hall: "kak zakhotelos' ei tam pobrodit' mezhdu vysokikh nezhnykh tsvetov i prokhladnykh svetlykh fontanov!" (p. 9). Carroll's original reads: "How she longed to get out of that dark hall, and wander about among those beds of bright flowers and those cool fountains . . ." (p. 4). Cincinnatus C. will feel just such a craving to wander in the Tamara Gardens in *Invitation to a Beheading* (see pp. 19, 27–28, 43). Although Nabokov's adaptation of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* may exhibit a slight lack of polish characteristic of a young writer, it also displays the unerring instinct of a genuine artist and remains a sterling piece of literary creation.

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NOTES

1. See Boyd, 1990, p. 197.
2. See Demurova, 1970, p. 158, and Demurova, 1979, p. 315; see also Weaver, p. 61.
3. See Demurova, 1970, p. 158, and Weaver, p. 60.
4. See Demurova, 1970 and 1979, for a discussion of some of these efforts.
5. This has been suggested by Simon Karlinsky (1971, p. 312). According to Véra Nabokov, however, Nabokov stated that he had not seen a Russian translation before composing his own (see *SL* 519).
6. Etkind, p. 347 (the translation is mine).
7. I am grateful to Gene Barabtarlo for this observation as well as for other helpful comments he made after reading a version of this article. The edition of Nabokov's adaptation which I have used for this article is *Ania v strane chudes* (New York: Dover, 1976). The edition of Carroll's work which I have used is *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988). All quotations from these editions will be noted in the text by a parenthetical reference containing the page number.

8. Gardner, p. 100.
9. Mirsky, 1963, p. 75.

BEND SINISTER

Bend Sinister was Nabokov's second novel in English, but the first one written after he came to the United States in 1940. Its composition from 1942 to 1946 is well documented, both because Nabokov discussed his progress with Edmund Wilson at a time when their correspondence was still warm and frank (see *NWL*) and because he submitted a synopsis of the book to Doubleday in 1944 (*SL* 48–50). The letters to Wilson also reveal how frantically busy Nabokov was during these years. Along with writing fiction and criticism in English and poetry in Russian, he was making literary connections in a new land, teaching a full schedule, and pursuing entomological research to the point of obsession. Small wonder that he kept breaking his promise to finish the novel first called "The Person from Porlock," then "Game to Gunm" (after Volume X of the *Encyclopedia Brittanica*), and finally "Solus Rex" before he settled on the current title.

Critical response to *Bend Sinister* has been mixed, so that despite some strong support, it remains one of Nabokov's more problematic novels. Thus Wilson, who had found its predecessor *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* "absolutely enchanting" (*NWL* 49), was disappointed, largely because he felt that Nabokov's portrayal of the dictator Paduk (nicknamed "The Toad") was indifferent to contemporary political questions (*NWL* 182–83). Another doubter was Diana Trilling, the New York intellectual whose husband Lionel Trilling later wrote a notably searching review of *Lolita*. Trilling granted the aridity of current American naturalism but wondered whether Nabokov's "innovation in method" did not lead to its "own kind of sterile convention."[1] By contrast the Southern poet–critic Allen Tate praised the novel's "drama of mounting and extraordinary intensity" and called it "the only first rate piece of literature" he had read as an editor.[2] Similarly, when *Bend Sinister* appeared in England in 1960, the major critic Frank Kermode could compare it with *Tristram Shandy* and stress the "really overpowering intelligence" of its author.[3] But the Anglo/Caribbean/Indian novelist V.S. Naipaul, who might have appreciated the cultural multiplicity of *Bend Sinister*, tartly noted that such a "bizarre, puzzling and difficult" book was "not realistic, satirical or prophetic" enough for British readers and finally dismissed it as "too cerebral."[4]

Scholarship has been equally uncertain about *Bend Sinister*. It goes unmentioned in such standard surveys as *Fiction of the Forties* or the *Columbia Literary History of the United States*; and among Nabokov's English novels only *Transparent Things* gets less coverage in Phyllis Roth's fine collection of critical essays. Alfred Appel has cautiously suggested that its mainly European subject

matter "represents a kind of regression"[5] when viewed in the context of Nabokov's Americanization, which led to *Lolita*. Conceding the novel's ambitiousness of conception, Nabokov's biographer Brian Boyd points out that even the author seemed to doubt the execution once he finished it; for Boyd, *Bend Sinister* is "less successful than much of Nabokov's other mature fiction."[6] For D. Barton Johnson, however, the novel's startling ending, which switches abruptly from the hero Krug's horrific world to the author in his study, offers the "'classic' statement" of the two-world theme in Nabokov's career. Indeed, the theme's full emergence at "a time of immense strain in the author's life" heightens its authenticity.[7]

Given this controversy, it is intriguing that the novel's most influential critic has been Nabokov himself in his exceptionally detailed introduction for the Time Reading Program in 1965. Yet although Nabokov records that *Bend Sinister* was received with a "dull thud" (xii), he does not clearly state his own assessment, either for or against. Moreover, unlike his self-critique of *Lolita*, with its revelation of previous attempts to use the same subject matter, the *Bend Sinister* introduction merely grants "obvious affinities" with the nightmarish imprisonment of Cincinnatus in *Invitation to a Beheading*, written in 1934 (xii). Only later, in prefaces to his translated Russian short stories, does Nabokov acknowledge other precedents. He singles out the fusion of Hitler, Lenin, and Stalin in "Tyrants Destroyed," in 1938,[8] and the death of the hero's wife in "Ultima Thule," from the unfinished *Solus Rex* project of 1939–40.[9] An even clearer forerunner would be the 1937 story "Cloud, Castle, Lake," whose hero is bullied by Nazi-era Germans only to be saved by the intervention of a possibly god-like narrator.[10]

Rather than dissecting his creative process, Nabokov's introduction chooses to pursue three other issues. He clarifies several highly original experiments with narrative form, he attacks the "solemn reader" who might wish to relate his fiction to contemporary politics, and he glosses the novel's wide-ranging but subtly expressed cultural background. As a result, *Bend Sinister* offers a unique occasion for comparing Nabokov's actual practice with his stated aims both for this novel and for his art in general.

Two of Nabokov's comments on narrative form have strongly influenced later criticism of *Bend Sinister*. His best-known remark concerns the authorial intrusion at the end, described in Nabokov's 1944 synopsis as "a device never yet attempted in literature" (*SL* 50). With Krug facing death, the author stops the story, releases the hero from his misery, and in the process hints at "an anthropomorphic deity impersonated by me" (xviii). As Nabokov's deft formulation suggests, this scene involves more than breaking the reader's absorption in the text. Self-reflexivity dovetails ingeniously with ontology to produce a sense of revelation that mimics the way an elusive deity might manifest itself in the world. In a larger sense, this moment is crucial for what might be called the metafictional-metaphysical trend in Nabokov's career. As Johnson points out, it brilliantly expresses the motif of "worlds in regression"

that goes back to a breakthrough work like *Invitation to a Beheading* and looks ahead to a masterpiece like *Pale Fire*.[11]

The issues raised by the ending also color the general fabric of *Bend Sinister*, as the introduction shows by discussing the puddle which the author glimpses in the opening sentence and which reappears in various guises throughout the novel (xiv-xv). This family of images, aptly termed a "watermark" by Antonina Filonov Gove,[12] gives a vivid, though somewhat esoteric, sign of the author's continued presence in the fiction. Developing Nabokov's hints, Johnson has shown how the watermark multiplies to form footprints, inkblots, kidneys, single-celled organisms, and the like; he also explores how these images relate to the heraldic bend sinister in Nabokov's title.[13] Susan Fromberg Schaeffer gives the introduction a new twist by identifying a second set of images based on three circles.[14] Starting with the stone Krug touches while crossing a bridge (*BS* 12), this image returns as birthmarks on his son's face (27) and as three soccer balls in his boyhood (65). It finally becomes the faces of Krug, his wife, and his son (232), then the glass of milk and sleeping tablets at the author's bedside (241). Gove adds yet another twist by proposing that the most eloquent authorial watermark is not imagistic but linguistic. The novel's use of Russian, which is often explicit but also lurks behind certain English formulations, is crucial given Nabokov's background as a Russian writer.[15] Even as they obscurely reveal the author through the text, these varied watermarks act out the barely perceptible appearances of an enigmatic deity in the "real" world and thereby anticipate the conclusion.

Two other experiments noted by Nabokov have received less attention. But both of them undermine conventional fictional categories, and, though Nabokov does not make this point, they converge with the metafictional-metaphysical problematic by suggesting an uncanny permeability between realms or concepts that are normally kept apart. Thus Paduk and his associates, dismissed as "absurd mirages" (*BS* xiv), upset the reader's habit of granting an independent existence to literary characters. Here *Bend Sinister* contributes to the larger Nabokovian polemic which demotes characters from human beings to mere puppets or "galley slaves."[16] Yet at the end of the novel (240, 241), when the author is distracted by a moth which the introduction identifies as "Olga's rosy soul" (xix), Krug's dead wife unexpectedly lives on in the author's world. Characterization regains some of the power it had apparently lost, and ends up suspended between human warmth and unpredictability on the one hand and total subordination to authorial control on the other.[17] Similarly, chapter 5 (63–82) bridges the supposed opposites of past and present as it oscillates between Krug's boyhood memories (themselves colored by more recent images and concerns) and six grotesque, fragmentary images of Olga leaving earthly existence (xv). This display of authorial freedom from linear temporality anticipates the abrupt shifts of time levels in Nabokov's autobiography *Speak, Memory*, which he completed in the years after *Bend Sinister*. Yet

because the chapter expresses Krug's anguish at Olga's death, it ironically uses that temporal freedom to confront an ultimate triumph of linear succession.

On the political issue, Nabokov disclaims any desire to add to "the literature of social comment" or to show the "influence of my epoch" (xii). He then insists that his novel "is not really about life and death in a grotesque police state" (xiii). This seeming aloofness from contemporary history was what had bothered Wilson in the 1940s. But by the 1960s Nabokov's vehement disengagement struck a responsive chord among his admirers, few of whom shared his experience of police states. Opinions polarized, with socially oriented critics following Wilson in questioning whether true art must disregard politics. By now, however, it is clear that nuances in Nabokov's practice place him well beyond this simple dichotomy. Thus David Rampton, who has pursued issues of historical meaning with special care, can argue that many of Nabokov's controversial doctrines need to be qualified by his art, which is much more subtle and varied.[18] *Bend Sinister* may avoid a general historical account of European police states, but this particular refusal on Nabokov's part does not mean that he has nothing to add to the topic or that his fiction is indifferent to modern dictators.

To begin with basic assumptions, Nabokov's flight from both the Communists and Nazis does not produce a book that focuses solely on "totalitarianism," the term of choice in the late 1940s for comparing Fascism and Communism. By setting his novel in an invented country whose language combines German and Russian, or by speaking elsewhere of the "Communazis," Nabokov certainly opens himself to such a reading. But *Bend Sinister* also refers at times to contemporary American mass culture, and these allusions are more than episodic as Nabokov makes clear when outlining the ideological background of Paduk's revolution.

In this account, the fictitious equivalent for Marx or the Russian radicals of the 1860s is the nineteenth-century egalitarian theorist Fradrik Skotoma. The corresponding Fascist genealogy harks back to Paduk's father, "a vegetarian, a theosophist, a great expert in cheap Hindu lore" (67). This syndrome prepares for the chapter on the "pogromystic" writings of Pankrat Tzikutin (165–169), and incidentally parallels another novel with a Germano-Slavic setting, Robert Musil's *Young Törless*, in which the youthful proto-Nazi Beineberg also dabbles in Asian mysticism. Yet alongside the usual totalitarian sources for Paduk's "Ekwilist" politics, Nabokov includes the Dagwood-like Etermon comic strip, with its glorification of an "average" middle-class existence and its affinities with mass advertising (77–80). In part, this approach recalls Theodor Adorno, another cultivated European who fled Hitler for America only to recoil from the stereotypes generated by the "culture industry." But Nabokov was also driven by intellectual fairness, a sense that beyond totalitarianism there were other threats to individuality closer to home. In this spirit, when he defined "*poshlust*" in 1944, he conceded that although it flourished in Germany, it was not just a German phenomenon. Indeed, to

"exaggerate the worthlessness of a country at the awkward moment when one is at war with it" itself attested to the smugness and triviality of "*poshlust*" (*NG* 64–65). As with Antiterra, which rearranges earthly geography in *Ada*, *Bend Sinister*'s landscape of tyranny invites the reader to test accustomed boundaries.

To support Nabokov's denial of historical relevance, the introduction to *Bend Sinister* claims that instead of dictatorship his main theme is "the beating of Krug's loving heart, the torture an intense tenderness is subjected to" (xiv). This torture peaks in the climactic chapter 17 (209–226) where Krug learns that his son David, after being taken hostage to ensure Krug's co-operation with the regime, has been killed in a supposed therapeutic experiment. Far from being unhistorical, of course, this scene resonates with several extreme events in twentieth-century Europe, most notably Stalin's purges and the Nazi Final Solution. Soon after finishing *Bend Sinister*, in fact, Nabokov would write his sister about "things that torment too deeply, e.g., the German vilenesses, the burning of children in ovens—children as funny and strongly loved as our children."[19] Even in the introduction, he takes credit for exposing the Soviet manipulation of family ties to control dissidents, the so-called "lever of love" (xiii). To reconcile these major historical overtones to David's tragedy with Nabokov's massive rejection of historical meaning in literature, it is clear that a more precise definition of terms is needed.

For Nabokov in the introduction, history means "general ideas" (xii), which suggests the Hegelian-Marxist tradition of philosophical history, but which includes any group-oriented, categorizing account of public events, whether geopolitical, sociological, journalistic, or simply stereotypical. Hence, a decade earlier in *The Gift*, Nabokov had satirized the way Zina Mertz's stepfather discussed politics: "The names of countries and of their leading representatives became . . . labels for more or less full but essentially identical vessels" (159). In contrast to these abstractions, David's death is intensely personal. Recalling *Macbeth* and the obliteration of Macduff's family in "one fell swoop" (IV, iii), it envisions the overweening power of dictatorship as a sudden, horrifying violation of parental feeling. In other words, despite Nabokov's distaste for general explanations, his "main theme" does respond to history, but it does so by translating the extremity of its epoch into concrete, individualized situations and images. To achieve this goal, Nabokov takes two distinct approaches, one of which may be called "felt history," the other "hypothetical autobiography."

Felt history refers to the direct physical impact of historical events on the body and senses of a single character. An example from one of Nabokov's favorite novels would be the link between Russian modernization and Anna Karenina's recurrent nightmares of a bearded peasant fumbling with some pieces of iron, nightmares which culminate with her suicide beneath a train.[20] Similarly, David's cruel fate, where "the development . . . to limb tearing, bone breaking, deoculation, etc. took a considerable time" (*BS* 219–20), shifts

attention from Paduk's regime as a composite dictatorship to its consequences in direct bodily experience. Hypothetical autobiography, as a second means of individualizing history, highlights *Bend Sinister*'s place in Nabokov's career, just before his autobiography *Speak, Memory* and just after such fictive ventures in life-writing as *The Gift* and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. *Bend Sinister* takes a hypothetical approach because, though Krug's refusal to flee contrasts with the experience of his much-exiled author, the loss of David (and more loosely his wife) does actualize the possible fates of Nabokov's Jewish wife and child under Hitler. In other words, the novel removes dictatorship from the realm of historical abstraction by imagining how it ravages the family of Nabokov's Germano-Russian alter ego.

Together these approaches to history help explain two oddities in the way Nabokov handles his "main theme," the refusal to describe David's actual death and the authorial intrusion to rescue Krug. In the first case, when the film of the murderous therapeutic experiment is stopped before Krug or the reader gets past the innocuous beginnings (222–24), Nabokov repeats the horrifying imprecision of "etc." in the already cited summary of David's ordeal. Rather than giving full documentation, Nabokov assumes that felt history needs only enough initial details to fire the reader's imagination. Moreover, as suggested in his comments to his sister, he probably avoided detailed description because it was personally too tormenting. In this situation, however, this reticence has its own historical validity, for similar psychological barriers did keep actual witnesses of extremity from speaking the unspeakable. Viewers of *Shoah* will remember the agony of Jan Karski, who must discuss the Warsaw Ghetto for the first time since he brought news about what was happening to London during World War II.[21] Similarly Primo Levi, a writer-scientist with Nabokov's passion for scrupulous accuracy, simply cannot describe his departure for Auschwitz: "Many things were then said and done among us; but of these it is better that there remain no memory."[22]

Ultimately, when Krug's own sufferings threaten to become unbearable, *Bend Sinister* switches to the "comparative paradise" (241) of the author, who appears "among the chaos of written and rewritten pages" (240). As noted above, this moment has strong metaphysical implications, but because it also recalls Nabokov's personal safety while writing about Krug and Paduk, the shift in narrative level embodies the logic of hypothetical autobiography. Nabokov could have experienced his hero's loss of wife and child, but did not, so he reminds readers of this difference when he moves the story out of Paduk's world. The author's "comparative paradise" is thus historical as well as metaphysical. Later in life, when Nabokov contemplated the unhypothetical sufferings of Mandelshtam and Solzhenitsyn, he showed a clear awareness that his own encounters with dictatorship, though more direct than those of most English-language readers, had still been relatively benign. As he states in *Strong Opinions*, "when I read Mandelshtam's poems composed under the accursed rule of those beasts, I feel a kind of helpless shame" (58).

On a third topic, the introduction illuminates *Bend Sinister*'s cultural background by explaining scattered references to other writers. Nabokov concedes that not all readers will appreciate "these delicate markers whose very nature requires that they be not too conspicuous" (xvii). Yet he insists on the crucial role of intertextuality (the blanket term for echoes, allusions, parodies, polemics, and the like) in his fiction: "what pleases me most is the wayside murmur of this or that hidden theme" (xviii).

Nabokov's quick overview (xvi-xviii) identifies Pankrat Tzikutin with the execution of Socrates, discusses parodic send-offs on twentieth-century best-sellers, and mentions oblique tributes to cartoonist Saul Steinberg and to Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. He also explains a reference to American immigration procedures (233) and reveals that a passage from "a famous American poem" (155) was actually a versification of *Moby Dick*. Fuller coverage is given to Shakespeare, especially *Hamlet*, and to a line from Mallarmé's "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune," or "The Afternoon of a Faun." This list, despite its apparent randomness, does evoke Nabokov's cultural persona in the mid-1940s. Here is a writer who feels more and more at home in the English language and in the United States, who ranges through the Western tradition for pointed analogies, and who identifies with modern experimental literature in several languages while keeping a sardonic eye on middlebrow taste. Yet one element of Nabokov's background is oddly missing: though the Germano-Russian setting of *Bend Sinister* enters the text as "bits of Lenin's speeches, and a chunk of the Soviet constitution, and gobs of Nazist pseudo-efficiency" (xiii), this influence apparently stops with literature. Nabokov mentions no Russian writers and rules out "the great German," Franz Kafka (xii).

In a short introduction, of course, not even Nabokov could hope to detail his complex relation to writers in several cultural traditions. Still, given the deceptive statements that he made three months later in the "booby-trapped Foreword" to *The Defense*,[23] it is striking how often his survey seems incomplete or misleading. The denial of Kafka is a particularly obvious example, for it overlooks a weird item in Krug's study, a beetle-shaped bootjack abandoned beneath an armchair (33–34). Readers will recall Kafka's Gregor Samsa, neglected by his family after he changed into a gigantic insect, who hides beneath a sofa to spare their sensibilities. Indeed, the passage even calls the bootjack "unloved" and mentions its nickname Grégoire, an apparent acknowledgement that Nabokov read Kafka in French translation (see "Nabokov and Kafka" in this volume). Despite the introduction, therefore, Nabokov did recognize a Kafkaesque side to *Bend Sinister*, perhaps in the idea of "a wrong turn taken by life" (xii). This phrase, which explains Nabokov's choice of title, clearly applies to Gregor's metamorphosis as well.

Similar blind spots mark the discussions of Shakespeare and Joyce, the two masters who presided over Nabokov's shift to English. Though the point is not mentioned in the introduction, these writers overlap in chapter 7 when Krug discusses *Hamlet* with his friend Ember (105–128), thereby recalling not only

Shakespeare but the *Hamlet* chapter of *Ulysses*.[24] According to Nabokov, however, the Shakespearean resonances of chapter 7 boil down to naming three *Hamlet* passages Ember has translated into various foreign languages (xvi). Nothing is said about a fourth passage, though it is taken from "my favourite scene" (119), and though it prompts Krug to reflect eloquently on Shakespeare's imagery. Nor does Nabokov gloss the phrase "*laderod kappe*" in his invented language (120), which clearly corresponds to Horatio's "morn, in russet mantle clad" (Hamlet I, i, 166),[25] and which Ezra Pound also cited in a famous defense of imagism.[26] Given that *Strong Opinions* dismisses Pound as "definitely second-rate" (43), this veiled confrontation between Krug's imagism and Pound's suggests Nabokov's willingness to question a major American version of literary modernism.

As indicated above, despite many links with *Hamlet*, *Bend Sinister* also resonates with *Macbeth*. Thus the name of Nabokov's tyrant, which suggests Russian words for "fall" or "decline,"[27] would be "paddock" in English. And this is a Shakespearean word for "toad," thereby answering Nabokov's teaser about how Paduk got that nickname (*BS* 67). But "paddock" is not just Hamlet's epithet for the usurping King Claudius, the agent of Denmark's rottenness (III, iv, 190); as Patteson indicates,[28] it is also an evil spirit invoked by the witches when Macbeth begins (I, i, 9). Later, a toad is the first object they throw in the cauldron before Macbeth comes to consult them and then, like Paduk with David, decides to murder Macduff's family (IV, i, 6).

Both "*laderod kappe*" and Paduk's name illustrate the multilingual wordplay that *Bend Sinister* shares with *Finnegans Wake*. But Nabokov's explanation of a joking reference to *Winnepeg Lake* in the introduction (xviii) says nothing about his telling allusions to *Ulysses*, the book he saw as Joyce's masterpiece. Here the *Hamlet* chapter matters less than Nabokov's pointed responses to several stylistic innovations in *Ulysses*. Thus when Krug finally sees David's dead body (224), the passage echoes Bloom's vision of his dead son Rudy at the end of "Circe" (497). But instead of the odd sense of healing in Joyce, Nabokov stresses the father's helplessness and the ghastly bungling of Paduk's regime. By recalling a brilliant moment of surreal fantasy in *Ulysses*, Nabokov underlines the harsher, nightmarish mood of *Bend Sinister*.

Nabokov's allusions avoid Joyce's Homeric scaffolding, the "mythical method" which T.S. Eliot admired so greatly.[29] But other key passages, which are notable because they extend the "loving heart" theme to include Krug's wife as well as his son, respond to the stream-of-consciousness style early in *Ulysses* and to the elaborate parodies in the middle chapters. When *Bend Sinister* begins, during Krug's sharpest grief for his wife's death, his thoughts and feelings often slip into what Nabokov called the "incomplete, rapid, broken wording" of the Joycean stream of consciousness before its final elaboration in Molly's monologue (*LL* 289). Yet this style, for all its capacity to show the mind's freedom in moving through time, never achieves Krug's real goal, to bring back an image of his wife from the past. The most vivid memories,

ironically, surface in more traditional, non-Joycean styles, such as the letter evoking Olga as a young woman (133–35) or the omniscient narrative of how she swerved to avoid hitting a deer (225–26).

If *Bend Sinister*'s verdict on stream-of-consciousness writing is divided, the novel pays a complex tribute to Joyce when Ember is arrested. When Krug misses a keepsake that had been a gift from his wife (126), he accuses an arresting officer of the theft. That officer is Linda Bachofen, later revealed as a sister of Mariette, the nursemaid-spy who seduces Krug just before David's capture. Nabokov's introduction does focus attention on this scene when it confirms that "Linda did not steal the porcelain owlet after all" (xviii), but fails to mention its rich echoes of Joycean parody. Suspicious Krug "must have had a heart of stone" not to be "ashamed of his evil thought," while Linda defends herself, her "breasts moistly heaving among the frills" of her blouse. Linda's picture evokes the "heaving embonpoint" and "costliest frillies" of an erotic novel Bloom buys for his wife Molly; and "heart of stone" and "evil thought" recall the cliché-ridden monologue of Gerty McDowell in "Nausicaa."[30] Nabokov thus acknowledges a Joyce who was poised, like himself, between stylistic experiment and the parody of subliterary genres. Moreover, because the scene involves Linda's supposed theft of an object linked with Olga and because Krug's suspicion turns briefly to desire, it captures an emerging conflict between a widower's grief and his reviving sexuality, a conflict which will become more obvious when he focuses on Mariette instead of her sister Linda. Though the situation is extreme and far less ambiguous than Bloom's troubled marriage, it does parallel Joyce in stressing a certain fidelity—Nabokov's view of *Ulysses*'s final "Yes" (*LL* 370)—while acknowledging the vagaries of desire.

The introduction also considers Krug's infatuation with Mariette, but in another context—during the commentary on Mallarmé, even though the references to "The Afternoon of a Faun" come much earlier in *Bend Sinister*. This self-analysis of Nabokovian intertextuality is especially probing because it goes beyond merely identifying the sources to explore function. As a "voluptuous eclogue" (xvii), Mallarmé's poem obviously relates to Krug's reviving sexuality. Nabokov goes on to show how the motif of a broken tryst connects Mariette's seduction with Krug's "donje te zankoriv" (60), a fragment of Paduk-speak with which he excuses himself when he interrupts a necking couple. Actually, however, the phrase has twisted the last four words of Mallarmé's "Sans pitié du sanglot dont j'étais encore ivre," a line Nabokov translates in erotic terms as "spurning the spasm with which I was still drunk" (xvii).

But Nabokov's further comment that "Death, too, is a ruthless interruption" remains enigmatic until we see the ambiguity of "sanglot" and "ivre." In their literal meanings of "sob" and "drunk," they refer to Krug's stunned grief for his wife as well as to what Nabokov calls his "heavy sensuality." During

Krug's dream of the past (81–2), accordingly, in a Mallarmé allusion that goes unmentioned, a class theme on "The Afternoon of a Faun" dissolves into the painful vision of Krug's wife removing the jewels of earthly existence. The Mallarmé line thus evokes not just the hero's voluptuous but his grief-stricken side; as a result, it enriches the novel's main theme by showing marital complexities alongside the parental simplicity of Krug's "loving heart." Indeed, the Mallarmé–Mariette association has even allowed Nabokov to extend the theme of interruption already present in his first title, which recalled the "person from Porlock" who kept Coleridge from finishing "Kubla Khan."

In the international cultural world of *Bend Sinister*, Mallarmé is Joyce's French counterpart as an experimental writer. Yet there are interesting ambiguities which suggest that Nabokov's real French interests lie elsewhere. During Krug's dream of the past, Mallarmé appears as "an uncle of his mother" (81), an odd fancy that seems to anticipate a different approach to the modernity of modern French literature. For after *Bend Sinister*, when Nabokov resumed his autobiography, the first chapter he wrote was a portrait of his mother's brother, Uncle Ruka (*SM* 9–10); though this uncle also wrote French poetry, it is said to resemble Proust rather than Mallarmé.[31] This name change, which amounts to a declaration of Nabokov's affinity for the modern French literature of memory, has already taken a related form within Krug's dream itself. When the chapter begins by comparing the hero's return to boyhood with recovering "those dusty trifles, those debts, those bundles of illegible letters" (64), the images evoke Proust's acknowledged precursor Baudelaire, who likewise envisions the remembered past as a jumbled heap of debris.[32]

Within this cross-cultural network of allusions to Shakespeare and to French, German, and Irish modern writers, what has happened to Nabokov's Russian background? Considering *Bend Sinister* and other works of the 1940s, S.E. Sweeney has shown that elaborate, ambiguous metaphors like the acrobatic performance at the end of chapter 4 (60–61) derive in part from Gogol,[33] the subject of a critical study Nabokov wrote in 1944. Another key affiliation surfaces just before Mariette's seduction when Krug, ostensibly a brilliant philosopher but unable to write during his troubles, has a flash of inspiration. Addressing the nature and destiny of consciousness, he notes that the vast expanse of time before our births parallels the mystery of the hereafter but awakens much less fear. This discrepancy in temporal outlook, he continues, resembles living in a stocking that is being turned inside out (193). Telling imagery has always characterized Krug's style (cf. 46), but here Nabokov intends a tribute to Tolstoy. In "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" the protagonist resists death as a threatening black sack into which his illness is pushing him; then, in his last moments, he sees light on the other side. Krug's image shifts Ivan's fear of enclosure and his disorientation from Tolstoyan life-and-death questioning to the Nabokovian dilemma of an infinite past and

future, soon to reappear in *Speak, Memory* (19–20). But Nabokov also honors the precision and graphic force of Tolstoy's writing, which in this new guise has informed Krug's best moment of inspiration and thus replaces Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" in the original interruption narrative. Thus, even as Nabokov deepens his commitment to English, he still acknowledges the expressive power and spiritual insight of his Russian literary heritage.

Though enlightening and provocative, Nabokov's survey of his intertextual practices in *Bend Sinister* is also partial and misleading. When he calls these references "hidden themes," he implies that they are more than incidental, that they help express the work's basic purposes. Yet often his commentary amounts to mere annotation, and even then it avoids pointed parallels involving *Ulysses* and *Macbeth*, or Kafka and Tolstoy. Nonetheless, the introduction does convey Nabokov's unusual skill in choosing details from writers in several traditions and synthesizing them to serve his special artistic purposes. In the background of *Bend Sinister*, as elsewhere, Nabokov assembles a multilingual culture of his own from which he forges his strikingly international career.

Written when *Lolita*'s success gave him a second chance with *Bend Sinister*, Nabokov's introduction places the phrase "anthropomorphic deity" in the last paragraph, where it gains maximum resonance. This formula for the novel's glide from metafiction to metaphysics helped set the agenda for later discussion of Nabokov's innovations in technique. Yet for readers alert to discrepancies between statement and practice, Nabokov's comments on fiction and politics or on intertextuality are equally revealing. Indeed, discussion of these topics here has suggested the force of another, almost incidental phrase in the introduction—"this crazy-mirror of terror and art" (xvi). As a "crazy-mirror" Nabokov's novel doubly violates standard notions of imitation, first by avoiding a "realistic," journalistic account of European dictatorship, then by veiling its pointed allusions to other writers behind an ingenious reworking of their language and themes. "Terror and art," meanwhile, capture this novel's special place in its author's career. Even as it interweaves Russian, European, and American motifs to create a unique international vision, *Bend Sinister* ranges across the disasters of political turmoil and dictatorship and at the same time evokes the exhilarating experiments of modern literature. It is Nabokov's most inventive, widely inclusive, and emotionally probing treatment of the dizzying ups and downs that marked him and Western culture between the Bolshevik "revolution" and the end of World War II.

John Burt Foster, Jr.

NOTES

1. Page, p. 23.

2. Boyd, 1991, p. 108.
3. Page, pp. 77, 76.
4. Page, p. 74.
5. Appel, 1974, p. 72.
6. Boyd, 1991, pp. 105–06.
7. D. Barton Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 218, 186.
8. In *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories*, p. 2; see also Burns.
9. In *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*, pp. 147–48; see also Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 210–15.
10. In *Nabokov's Dozen*.
11. D. Barton Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, p. 218.
12. Gove, p. 87.
13. D. Barton Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 194–97.
14. Schaeffer, 1973, pp. 125–34.
15. Gove, pp. 87, 88–89.
16. See Pifer, 1980, pp. 1–13.
17. In a further emphasis on this state of suspension, authorial control in *Bend Sinister* can even seem dictatorial, leading to a clash with the novel's political subject matter. For discussions of this irony, see Baxter's critique (pp. 818–21) and Walker's more sympathetic account (1987, pp. 275–79).
18. Rampton, 1984, pp. 1–14.
19. For this passage from Nabokov's letters, see Toker, 1989, pp. 177–78, who is the translator.
20. John Foster, 1986, pp. 210–13.
21. Lanzmann, p. 167.
22. Levi, p. 12.
23. D. Barton Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 86–92.
24. *Ulysses*, ed. Gabler, Random House, 1986, pp. 151–79.
25. Shakespeare, *Complete Works* (all subsequent references to Shakespeare's works are from this edition). Referring to this seemingly opaque phrase, Krug has objected to "the colour of dawn's coat—I see 'russet' in a less leathery, proletarian way" (120).
26. Pound, 1968, p. 6.
27. D. Barton Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, p. 199.
28. Patteson, 1977, p. 252, n. 12.
29. Eliot, 1975, p. 178.
30. *Ulysses*, ed. Gabler, Random House, 1986, pp. 194, 284–301.
31. Nabokov, "Portrait . . ." p. 26.
32. See "Spleen: J'ai plus de souvenirs" ("Spleen: I have more memories"), ll. 2–4: "A bureau, its drawers well stuffed with souvenirs, / verses, love-letters, novels, old processes, / receipted bills wrapped around heavy tresses." Translation by C.F. MacIntyre, p. 17.
33. Sweeney, 1987. See the introduction, p. xvi, for Nabokov's proposal of a pseudo-Shakespearean influence on this passage. Given his partiality in explaining the novel's allusions, his actual comments matter less than his decision to draw attention to this metaphor. Perhaps an Anglo-Russian synthesis of Gogol and Shakespeare is intended.

BILINGUALISM

Vladimir Nabokov insisted that a writer must be identified by his special pattern or unique coloration, and he was exasperated by attempts to force him into national and linguistic pigeon holes. "Nobody can decide if I'm a middle-aged American writer, or an old Russian writer—or an ageless international freak," he once complained (*SO* 106). But to agree that Nabokov should be identified by his unique coloration is not to say that he was totally unclassifiable. Nabokov should be seen as one of the most distinctive twentieth-century examples of a category once widespread and now almost extinct: the bilingual, or, in Nabokov's case, the trilingual, writer.

In many ways, bilingual or polyglot writers have more in common with each other, whatever their national origins, than they do with monolinguals who write in any one of their languages. Nabokov manifested a number of traits which research has shown to be generally characteristic of bilinguals. Bilingualism confers advantages for cognitive tasks involving metalinguistic awareness, separating word sound and meaning, and generating synonyms and original uses. Sensitivity to the pleasures of redundancy and play is fostered by bilinguals' awareness of the inherent separability of sign and referent, an awareness which Nabokov developed into a mastery of the potential for defamiliarization provided by even slight variations in vocabulary and levels of language. Bilingualism also correlates with superiority in "divergent thinking."[1] Bilinguals are less inclined to rely on rigid and unvarying processing strategies and are particularly good at seeking out patterns. They also demonstrate a heightened sense of the "relativity of things" and greater than usual tolerance for certain kinds of ambiguity. Their sense of linguistic *option* provides what Wallace Lambert has called "a comparative three dimensional insight into language, a type of stereolinguistic optic on communication that the monolingual rarely experiences."[2] (For more on the neurolinguistic and cognitive aspects of literate bilingualism, see Beaujour, 1989.)

Nabokov not only shares the above characteristics with his fellow bilinguals, he exemplifies them, and his development as a bilingual writer presents an almost ideal trajectory which many of his less completely bilingual or artistically less distinguished colleagues have only approximated. (For a discussion of other bilingual writers, see Beaujour, 1989, Forster, 1970, and Miller, 1982.)

Bilingualism was an intrinsic part of the quintessentially Russian aristocratic childhood which Nabokov memorializes in *Drugie berega* and *Speak, Memory*. Somewhat unusually, English was the second domestic language rather than French, and Nabokov was, by his own admission, an English as well as a Russian child (*SO* 81). He has said that he had spoken English with the same ease as Russian since infancy. (According to Field, Nabokov once claimed that English was in fact his first language and that his mother had to translate Russian terms for him when he was two or three.)[3] The first good-

night prayers that Nabokov remembered were in English (*SM* 85–86), and he and his brother could read and write English before they were literate in Russian (*SM* 79). French was added when he was five, and Nabokov then became "a perfectly normal trilingual child in a family with a large library" (*SO* 43). While French was not as "native" to him as Russian and English, it continued to be a strong third language (Nabokov once said that he might have been a great French writer, had fate and politics not sent him and his family across the ocean to America),[4] and Nabokov corrected the translations of his novels into French himself.

While his parents also knew other languages, Russian, English, and French were the languages used in everyday domestic parlance, and as is commonly the case when bilinguals or parallel polyglots speak among themselves, there was considerable code-switching. Nabokov gives a good example of this kind of discourse in the passage of *Speak, Memory/Drugie berega* which describes the moment when the family learned of the death of Leo Tolstoy (*SM* 207–208; *Drugie berega* 189). The code-switching in *Ada*, so frustrating to monolingual readers, reflects this mode of polyglot communication, which is perfectly normal in informal conversation, but which got Nabokov in trouble when he similarly "peppered" his high school papers with English and French terms (*SM* 185).

Although he continued to read English during his adolescent years, Nabokov used it less than he had in his childhood until he went up to Cambridge in 1919. There he did write a few poems in English (several of which were published), but his main goals during his Cambridge years were to preserve his Russian from contamination and decay despite the linguistic isolation of exile and to continue his development as a Russian-language poet. To these ends, he read Dahl's great *Dictionary of the Living Russian Language* religiously and wrote numbers of what he later called "polished and rather sterile Russian poems" (*SM* 266). Nabokov generally continued to avoid using English or French for artistic purposes throughout the 1920s, and his translations during this period were into Russian rather than out of it (*Alice in Wonderland* into *Ania v strane chudes;* some poems by Rupert Brooke, Seumas O'Sullivan, etc.; Romain Rolland's *Colas Breugnon*, Russianed under the title *Nikolka Persik*). There were a few small exceptions: a self-translation of one of his own Russian poems into English and a poem and two essays written directly in English which Nabokov contributed over three different signatures to the short-lived, trilingual Berlin journal *Karrousel.* (Boyd identifies these essays as Nabokov's first use of English prose for an artistic purpose.)[5]

Until the mid-1930s, there was no doubt that V. Sirin (the pseudonym that Nabokov had adopted in the beginning of his career) was a Russian-language writer, and while some critics argued that his tone and attitude were more "generic European" than Russian, others, such as Berberova and Khodasevich, saw in him the most promising prose writer among the younger generation of the Russian emigration. Certainly *Dar* (*The Gift*), the last,

greatest, and warmest of Nabokov's Russian novels, shows no traces of polyglot "contamination," although Nabokov had written a small autobiographical sketch in English about his childhood associations with England and had translated his novel *Otchaianie* (*Despair*) into English while he was still working on *The Gift*.[6]

Since his German was not very good (he sometimes claimed not to speak it at all), it had been relatively easy for Nabokov to wrap himself securely and almost exclusively in his Russian during the Berlin years. In Paris after 1937, however, such linguistic isolation was more difficult, and in the late 1930s, while continuing to write predominantly in Russian, Nabokov did some writing in French: a rhymed translation of several Pushkin lyrics, an article on Pushkin, and an autobiographical fragment, "Mademoiselle O," which he claims to have "dashed off" easily during several days in January 1937.[7] More important, he also began seriously to use English for "artistic purposes."

Many potentially bilingual writers are precipitated into committing themselves to writing seriously in a second or third language by a disagreeable experience with self-translation. Knowing the target language well, they find their works disfigured and traduced by giftless native-speaker translators, so they decide to do the job themselves. But the process of self-translation turns out to be unexpectedly tormenting, and they reluctantly decide that it is less painful to write directly in their second or third language than it is to translate themselves from one language to another. (For some reasons why this is so, see "Translation and Self-translation" elsewhere in this volume.) Having translated *Otchaianie* into *Despair* in 1936 and *Kamera obskura* into *Laughter in the Dark,* Nabokov wrote his first English-language novel: *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* which among other things concerns the problems that writing in English posed for Sebastian Knight (a Russian-born, Cambridge-educated, English-language writer) and for the narrator of the novel, Knight's biographer, his younger half-brother for whom English is a third language.

The Real Life of Sebastian Knight is evidence that even before coming to America, Nabokov had passed beyond mere dabbling in English. He knew that he had a "second output system" (not his term) at his disposal. Once settled in the United States, he determined to abandon his Russian-language identity as Sirin and commited himself to writing prose only in English, under the name Vladimir Nabokov. There followed a period when Nabokov was "in training," somewhat like a prize fighter. (It is no accident that he and his characters frequently speak of their bilingual prowess in images of sports championships.) Active use of Russian was consequently forbidden. Nabokov complained bitterly about having been "forced" to abandon his "natural language," his "natural idiom," his "rich, infinitely rich and docile Russian tongue, for a second-rate brand of English" (*SO* 15), but he also admitted that the *linguistic transition* itself was endurable (*SO* 190). The emotional consequences of what he thought would be a permanent farewell to writing in Russian were, however, extremely painful. Nabokov experienced his abandon-

ment of Russian as an apostasy, a personal tragedy, and described it through images of betrayal, amputation, and dismemberment.[8] His complete switch to English was "exceedingly painful—like learning anew to handle things after losing seven or eight fingers in an explosion" (*SO* 54). As is the case with physical amputation, the missing members still seemed to be there and to hurt. Letters to his wife Véra and to other correspondents mention the torment of resisting the desire to write in Russian while his psychic and linguistic investment in English prose was solidifying. Slowly "the excitement of verbal adventure" did transfer itself to writing prose in English. But it is symptomatic of the linguistic violence he had exercised over himself in the preceding years that in his first American novel, *Bend Sinister* (despite its positive tetralingual cultural references), mixing of languages, code-switching, and hybridization of tongues are negatively marked, and paronomasia, cross-linguistic puns, neologisms, and spoonerisms are linguistic practices associated with a vile totalitarian country whose language Nabokov describes as "a mongrel blend of Slavic and Germanic with a strong strain of ancient Kuranian running through it . . ." (*BS* xvi).

Although he did not realize it yet, Nabokov had not severed his relations with Russian permanently. He had not *abandoned* Russian but merely temporarily *subordinated* it by restricting his prose writing to English. In fact, Nabokov was undergoing what might be somewhat more than metaphorically described as a refolding of his linguistic "layers,"[9] analogous to the "folded magic carpet" of memory which he describes in *Speak, Memory* (139). Or to use another image, he was beginning the second loop of a linguistic spiral. Yet even while remaining faithful to his newly legitimated English for prose until 1953, when he began to transform *Conclusive Evidence* into *Drugie berega,* Nabokov had somewhat guiltily allowed himself occasional poetic trysts with his "ruddy Russian muse" as early as the 1940s (*NWL* 44, 69, 121), and he later declared the few Russian poems written in this period to be his best (*SO* 54). His first American prose works had Russian subjects or associations,[10] and he continued to be actively involved with Russian in a variety of other ways, especially through translating major works of Russian literature into English. In early 1949, Nabokov had begun to think about doing "a small book" on *Eugene Onegin,* and in the fall of the same year, he made a line-by-line English version of *The Song of Igor's Campaign* to use in his teaching, because he found the existing translation stilted.[11]

By the end of the 1950s, Nabokov was functioning as a fully bilingual writer. In addition to having translated *The Song of Igor's Campaign,* he had supervised and revised his son's translation of Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* for which he had also written an introduction, and had also begun what was to become his monumental crib-cum-commentary on *Eugene Onegin.* (Rosengrant and other scholars have argued that Nabokov's translations are of such prodigious extent and diversity that they must be regarded as a principal part of his life's work.[12] See "Translation and Self-Translation" for more on

these matters.) By the late 1950s, *Bend Sinister* was already far behind. Through its sympathy for Timofey Pavlovich's comic epic struggles with America and English, and its somewhat distasteful narrator's freedom from such problems, *Pnin* had defused Nabokov's fear of the contamination of his Russian by his English or his English by his Russian. *Pnin* paved the way for that great American road novel, *Lolita*, which was also written at this period, and prepared the linguistic bravura of the last novels. By the late 1950s, Nabokov had also almost completed revising and transforming his memoirs, which, begun in French and English, had deepened and grown in the process of being reworked into Russian and were reaching their final incarnation, once again in English.

When one looks back over Nabokov's linguistic trajectory from *Look at the Harlequins!* to his trilingual childhood, it is clear that George Steiner was right to claim that a polylinguistic matrix was the determining fact of Nabokov's life and art and that "the multi-lingual, cross-linguistic situation is both the matter and form of Nabokov's mature work."[13] In some sense Nabokov's Russian and English works are symmetrical and bipolar. But while Nabokov had a highly developed sense of the specificity of each language in its cultural context, and was painfully aware as a translator that English and Russian do not always coincide, he also knew that his languages constantly interacted within him. Steiner already suspected in 1970 that whole episodes in *Lolita* as well as the "Augustan mock epic pastiche in *Ada*" hark back specifically to some of Nabokov's Russian-language poetry written in the 1920s and 1930s.[14] (More recently, Priscilla Meyer has shown surprising relationships between *Lolita* and *Eugene Onegin*.)[15] Furthermore, bilingualism or polyglottism is a subtext in all of Nabokov's English-language novels, and neither his lifelong loyalty to Russian, which remained his unforgettable, first linguistic love, nor his extraordinary virtuosity in English and his subsequent "love affair" with the English language (*Lo* 316) prevented or should have prevented his several languages from being actively engaged in all the writing of the last decades. Towards the end of his career, Nabokov permitted himself and his characters to function as fully individuated polyglots. In *Ada* especially, Nabokov allowed his characters to profit from being able to speak three languages, an advantage he described as "the ability to render an exact nuance by shifting from the language I am now using to a brief burst of French or to a soft rustle of Russian" (*SO* 184). *Ada* displays the complexity of the ways in which cultivated polyglots can communicate with each other using the full resources of several languages. Many of the novel's riches and much of its humor are hidden from the monolingual reader, who does not have access to the personal polyglot idiolect, sometimes referred to as "Nabokese," which overarches or underlies the three other languages at the author's command, and which is the outgrowth of the interplay between them.

Most of the other characteristic aspects of Nabokov's mature style are also functions of his polyglottism, the most obvious of these being trilingual

punning, the "shimmers of meaning" which Rowe sees redounding from a literal construction of two syllables or words,[16] the extraordinarily fecund generation of neologisms and "new uses," and the linguistic complexification and idiosyncratic brilliance of his English, which some critics have attributed to his being a "foreigner." But Nabokov was both a native speaker of English *and* a foreigner at the same time. The real point is that he was not a *monolingual* native speaker of either English or Russian, which is why his works are characterized by the "stereolinguistic optic on communication" previously mentioned. None of the narrators of Nabokov's English works are monolingual native speakers of English either, and most, except for poor Pnin, are fluent polyglots—a ploy that "motivates" the elaborate stylistic idiosyncrasies of Humbert Humbert and his fellows. This, however, should not fool the reader into assuming that Nabokov could not write Standard American. A glance at the *Beardsley Star*'s "Column for Teens" or Lolita's own characteristic language will dispel that assumption immediately.

Nabokov's polyglottism also functioned in symbiosis with other, essentially non-linguistic, systems of cognition. For example, he has claimed, as bilinguals frequently do,[17] that although he writes in several languages, he does not think in any of them but rather in *images*. His conviction that he thinks in images and that "now and then a Russian or English phrase will form with the foam of the brainwave" (*SO* 14) correlates with studies which suggest that bilinguals process even *language* input at some common semantic level "below" or "beyond" the language specific.[18] Michel Paradis, for example, proposes a "conceptual store" to which separate languages are differentially connected.[19]

Both the workings of memory and the creation of novels are frequently presented by Nabokov as beginning with visual images; sounds and words subsequently follow (e.g.: the "chocolate in the garden" scene in *Speak, Memory* [170–171] and Vadim Vadimich's description of the birth of his last novel [*LATH* 123]). The words, however, are not just "foam" and, as Vadim Vadimich has also said, we do imagine words when we need them. Van Veen shaves longer when his thought "'tries on' words" (*Ada* 539), and Nabokov's fictional poets Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev and John Shade struggle quite explicitly with *verbal images*.

Thinking in images and polyglottism are certainly also related to Nabokov's early passion for drawing and painting ("I think I was born a painter—really!" [*SO* 217]), and to his synesthesia, a kind of sensual code-switching manifested in his case as "colored hearing" and alphabetic chromoesthesia. As D.B. Johnson observes, this synesthesia affords an elegant metaphor for "the remarkable Russian and English literary careers which flow from his twin alphabetic rainbows."[20] It would seem, however, that the relationship between bilingualism and synesthesia is actually mutually reinforcing, rather than merely metaphoric, and that there is a very considerable area of overlap.

One should probably also note that entomology, about which Nabokov always wrote in English, and the creation of chess problems, which he

considered an artistic activity, were other systems of discourse that he had at his command. It is probably significant in this respect that Nabokov included some of his chess problems in the bilingual selection of those poems, originally written either in Russian or in English, which he wished to preserve.

Reflecting on his bilingual trajectory, Nabokov's Vadim Vadimich remarked that although in the world of athletic games "there has never been a World Champion of Lawn Tennis and Ski," he has achieved something comparable in two literatures, "as dissimilar as grass and snow" (*LATH* 122). In his own voice, Nabokov boastfully complained that no writer of any real stature had endured an experience comparable to his own change of languages in midstream.[21] But while Nabokov was not in fact the only great twentieth-century bilingual writer (one must not forget Beckett, and there are some more coming along as the century draws to its end, not the least of whom may be Joseph Brodsky), there can be no doubt that the polyvalent, polyglot, and multi-talented Nabokov spectacularly fulfilled the ambition expressed by his creation John Shade in Canto Four of the poem "Pale Fire." For surely no other writer has tried what Nabokov has tried, and no one has done what he has done (*PF* 64).

Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour

Notes

1. Beaujour, pp. 13–15.
2. Lambert, p. 10. See also Grosjean, and Hakuta.
3. Field, 1986, p. 127.
4. Field, 1977, p. 141.
5. Boyd, 1990, p. 218.
6. Ibid., p. 420.
7. Ibid., p. 422
8. Beaujour, chapter 2.
9. Steiner, 1975, p. 292.
10. Boyd, 1991, p. 70.
11. Ibid., p. 136.
12. Rosengrant.
13. Steiner, 1970, p. 125.
14. Ibid.
15. Meyer, 1988, pp. 11–38.
16. Rowe, 1971, p. 48.
17. Beaujour, chapter 2.
18. Doob, pp. 88–100.
19. Paradis, 1980, and Grosjean, pp. 247–8.
20. D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, p. 27.
21. *Drugie berega*, pp. 7–8; Field, 1977, p. 249.

CHESS AND CHESS PROBLEMS

For Nabokov, chess problems have remarkable "points of connection" with "other, more overt and fruitful, operations of the creative mind." Among these, he mentions "the writing of one of those incredible novels where the author, in a fit of lucid madness, has set himself certain unique rules that he observes, certain nightmare obstacles that he surmounts, with the zest of a deity building a live world from the most unlikely ingredients—rocks, and carbon, and blind throbbings" (*SM* 290–91). D. Barton Johnson notes that the single chapter of *Speak, Memory* devoted to Nabokov's twenty years of European exile has "but two topics: a curiously impersonal discussion of the émigré literary scene and an intensely personal discussion of chess problem composition."[1] In an interview in 1951, Nabokov described his autobiography as "a kind of composition" and himself as "a composer of chess problems."[2] Eight years later, he compared his inspiration for *Lolita* to an idea for a chess problem and acknowledged that each of his books reveals the same preoccupation with solving a "literary chess problem."[3]

Readers have pondered the importance of chess in Nabokov's novels since at least 1930, when *The Defense* was published.[4] In her brilliant review of *Pale Fire*, Mary McCarthy was the first to insist on the presence of a chess game or problem in one of Nabokov's novels; she imagined *Pale Fire* as "three simultaneous games played by a pair of chess wizards on three transparent boards arranged vertically."[5] A few years later, Strother B. Purdy surveyed Nabokov's "constant use of chess in his work" less enthusiastically, concluding that the "novelist as a composer of chess problems is at best a Joycean figure, making the best of exile and cunning, indifference and artifice," at worst a trickster preoccupied with complexity for its own sake.[6] In separate pieces I have discussed Nabokov's chess problems and chess problem ideas in *The Defense*, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, *Lolita*, and *Speak, Memory*.[7] Both D. Barton Johnson and Brian Boyd have written well about chess and *The Defense*. Johnson has also argued that the plot moves of *The Gift* are explicitly modelled on those of "a chess problem,"[8] and David I. Sheidlower has made the moves of the chess problem Nabokov published in *Speak, Memory* a key to the plot of *Bend Sinister* and a script for its last scene.[9]

Nabokov's heroes include a chess grandmaster (Luzhin in *The Defense*) and a chess problem composer (Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev in *The Gift*); chess games occur in several of the novels; and chess and chess problem language and imagery regularly put his readers' chess knowledge to the test. Humbert Humbert plays three chess games in *Lolita*; John Shade plays against Sybil and Kinbote (*Pale Fire*'s chess games end in draws); Pnin, in the eponymous novel, recalls the games his father used to play at their country home and himself prepares for a game with Chateau at the Pines; and Cincinnatus C., in *Invitation to a Beheading*, plays against his fate mate, M'sieur Pierre, who cheats outrageously.[10] The titular hero of *The Real Life of*

Sebastian Knight, who dies in St. Damier ("damier" is the French word for "chessboard"), and Clare Bishop, his mistress, are named for chess pieces, as is Sebastian's last love, the elusive Nina Rechnoy, whose maiden name is "Toorovetz" (the Russian word for rook is "toora" or "tura").[11] The chessboard provides a powerful metaphor for the limits of an assassin's debased imagination when Kinbote contrasts Gradus's inability to conceive of the "possible consequences" of his violent act with the way a chess knight at the edge of the board 'feels' the board's "phantom extensions," even though these immaterial squares "have no effect whatever on his real moves, on the real play" (*PF* 276). Earlier, Kinbote compares the experience of Zembla's king during the rebellion to that of the black king in a certain kind of chess problem, "a king-in-the-corner waiter of the *solus rex* type" (118–19).

Nabokov's repeated invocations of this type of chess problem mark its importance to his imaginative life. *Solus Rex* is the title for the unfinished Russian novel that evolved into *Pale Fire* as well as a late provisional title for *Bend Sinister*. In *Pnin*, Victor Wind has a recurrent dream that ends with "that crucial flight episode when the King alone—*solus rex* (as chess problem makers term royal solitude)—paced a beach on the Bohemian Sea, at Tempest Point . . ." (86). One critic's claim that *Bend Sinister*'s hero "Krug is in all respects an individual, to use a chess term that Nabokov was fond of, a *solus rex*,"[12] provides one more example of the pitfalls of imprecision Nabokov's readers dread, for the chess term speaks to the black king's isolation, not his individuality. There is a class of problems called, in older books, "intimidated problems," because the black king is unsupported by any man of his own color stronger than a pawn. If the king is entirely unsupported, the problem is of the *solus rex* type. If the king stands on one of the board's four extremities (e.g., "a beach on the Bohemian Sea, at Tempest Point"), the problem is of the king-in-the-corner type; an entire book has been devoted to such problems.[13] A "waiter" or waiting key move is one that does not threaten mate but instead avoids undoing or partly creates the balance of force that will make it possible for White to deliver mate in answer to several Black moves. White's quiet move allows Black more freedom than a threatening move would, but the onus is on Black, who may not, after all, be able to find a good response.

Paranoia, lunacy, and suicide stalk Kinbote, as they do so many other Nabokov protagonists, including Luzhin. In the Index to *Pale Fire*, the last entry under Charles II is "Solus Rex, 1000," followed by "See also Kinbote." Shade's poem includes only 999 lines, and it is Kinbote who supplies verse 1000, "which would have been identical to line 1 and would have completed the symmetry of its structure . . ." (15). Kinbote is mainly interested in having the reader notice not the symmetry of Shade's poem (for which Kinbote suggests the title "Solus Rex") but the recurrent pattern in Kinbote's life. At the close of his editorial labors, he is alone in a mountain cabin, condemned to listen to the noises emanating from an amusement park across the way and besieged by the executors of Shade's estate. The king is still cornered: the

climactic moment of two lives, Charles II's and Kinbote's, match up. We leave Charles Kinbote waiting for the threat of "a bigger, more respectable, more competent Gradus" (301). Knowing something about king-in-the-corner waiters of the *solus rex* type, we might expect Kinbote's opponent to reject an open threat for some quiet move, a waiting ploy somewhere else on the board.

Nabokov has published no chess problem of the *solus rex* type, but he has published seven problems in which the black king is unsupported by any man of his own color stronger than a pawn, and he is especially fond of waiter or block problems. C. H. O'D. Alexander, a fellow of the British Chess Problem Society and editor of *The Sunday Times* chess column, measured Nabokov's talents against an exacting standard when he described him (in 1970) as "quite a good chess problem composer—not the quality to win a prize, but good sound stuff."[14] The chess problem Nabokov included in *Speak, Memory*, one of his best compositions, merited inclusion in *Chess Problems: Introduction to an Art*, an advanced book by three leading British problemists, who praised its originality.[15] Solvers of the chess problems Nabokov published in the seventies in *The Problemist*, the Proceedings of the British Chess Problem Society, admire his characteristic wit and penchant for "the unexpected."[16] In 1970, Nabokov was invited to join the American team as a composer in future international chess-problem tournaments;[17] a problem he published in 1969 placed third in *The Problemist*'s Intermediate Composing Tourney; and another was a third prize winner in the journal's 1972–73 Selfmates Award Competition.

Although Nabokov published one of his chess problems in *Speak, Memory* (and referred to another, an ingenious retractor, in its foreword), he made a substantial selection of his chess problems easily accessible to readers only with the publication of *Poems and Problems* in 1970. In that book, he published eighteen problems, five of which had not previously been published in newspapers or journals. (The *Speak, Memory* problems frame the collection, appearing as Nabokov's first and last specimens.) In all, Nabokov has published at least thirty chess problems. Those that do not appear in *Poems and Problems* include three problems published in the Berlin émigré newspaper *Rul'* and its Sunday supplement *Nash mir* in 1923 and 1924, three problems published in the Paris émigré newspaper *Poslednie novosti* in 1932, one problem published in *The Evening News* in 1970, and five problems published in *The Problemist* after *Poems and Problems*.[18]

By his own account, Nabokov began composing chess problems late in 1917 (*PP* 15). The London notebook he kept in 1919 includes "a chess problem for virtually every poem," and, according to Boyd, he spent "many nights of creative concentration composing chess problems" during his émigré years.[19] In "the afterglow of the completed *Gift*," he "composed one chess problem after another," marking the end of his European exile with the chess problem published in *Speak, Memory*. Boyd establishes that Nabokov misdates his composition of this problem—substituting "mid-May 1940, immediately

before his departure," for November 19, 1939—and explains the "confusion": "within weeks of composing his chess problem, he realized that with the affidavits he had obtained, the real-life problem of an American visa was solved." But Nabokov may have deliberately misdated his problem in order to enable it to mark not just his departure for America but the fulfillment of his autobiographical project. If so, he confirmed the autobiography's revision of this part of his history by retaining the May 1940 date when he published the problem in *Poems and Problems*. In his introduction to that book, Nabokov, who published no chess problems during his first twenty years in America (when he published five novels in English), says that the loss of his "chess manuscripts" for this period "does not matter" (*PP* 15). Despite this hiatus, Nabokov's "final ten years would become, like his twenties and thirties, a time of lively interest in chess-problem composition."[20]

These biographical facts establish the consistency of Nabokov's engagement with chess problems and the level of his accomplishment. They establish little about his experience or accomplishment as a chess player. "A chess composer does not necessarily have to play well," Nabokov explains in relation to Fyodor, "a very indifferent player," who "played unwillingly" (*Gift* 171). The philosopher Max Black confirms Boyd's judgment that Nabokov himself "was never quite as good" a chess player "as might have been expected." Black, a colleague of Nabokov's at Cornell and a former chess champion at Cambridge, "made the mistake, as he recalls, of assuming Nabokov was a very strong player" and beat him twice, promptly and easily.[21] When Purdy posits that "Nabokov's comparison of chess to writing" in *Speak, Memory* has become "a critical commonplace,"[22] he misrepresents the force of Nabokov's comparison. Nabokov repeatedly insists on an analogy between the inspiration, composition, and design of chess problems—not chess games—and the inspiration, composition, and design of the novels he most admires.

The position that games and works of art have much in common is by now widely accepted; "in both the sequence of events is confined according to predetermined principles; both thus create 'enclosures' within the ground of ordinary, more or less fortuitously determined, experience."[23] A position better adjusted to Nabokov's art is that chess problems are more like works of art than are chess games, and that chess problem themes and strategies, in particular those expressed in Nabokov's own chess problem compositions, figure in his novels. A short list of chess ideas that are imaginatively important to Nabokov would have to include the theme of virtual play—something interesting that almost happens but doesn't, or might, in slightly different circumstances, actually happen—and at least two types of chess problems, those in which the black king is isolated and embattled, and those that propose a self-mate rather than a direct mate. Two positions Nabokov has himself taken on the relation between chess and his novels are thereby reconciled: on the one hand, he has affirmed that none of his novels is a plotted chess game[24]; on the other, he has

affirmed that each of them reveals the same preoccupation with solving a "literary chess problem."[25]

In *Poems and Problems*, Nabokov calls chess problems the "poetry of chess," reminding us that Fyodor likens the difference between chess problems and games to that between a "sonnet and the polemics of publicists" (*Gift* 171). But Nabokov's posture as a problemist can be defensive. Justifying publishing his chess problems together with his poems, he refuses "to apologize," anticipating at least one critic's resistance to his high claims: "the essence of the chess problem," says Purdy, is "complexity . . . for its own sake."[26] "Chess problems demand from the composer the same virtues that characterize all worthwhile art: originality, invention, conciseness, harmony, complexity, and splendid insincerity," Nabokov writes. "The composing of those ivory-and-ebony riddles is a comparatively rare gift and an extravagantly sterile occupation; but then all art is inutile, and divinely so, if compared to a number of more popular human endeavors. Problems are the poetry of chess . . ." (*PP* 15). W.K. Wimsatt, a chess problemist and the only literary theorist who has written about the relationship between poems and problems, shares Nabokov's view: "The objectivity of the chess problem, its economy in complexity, and the strict necessity and functionalism of every part admitted into the charmed closure of the whole, are features which ought to solicit the respectful attention of every literary theorist," he writes. "In these ways, let it even be recognized that the chess problem far outdoes the poem—though the complement of this must be immediately asserted, that the problem appears in a far more restricted sphere of human experience."[27] Both these accounts of the "points of connection" between chess problems and more fruitful or worthwhile "operations of the creative mind" point to the paradox "of 'trivial depth,' of a form of mental life ultimately insignificant—though enormously meaningful—and trapped in a world of mirrors."[28]

In both chess problems and chess games, the sequence of events is controlled by predetermined principles, but in games, we play with chance and take advantage of our opponent's mistakes, while in problems, the element of uncertainty all but disappears along with the competition between players. Nabokov's idea that a chess problem is related to a chess game only as "the properties of a sphere are made use of both by a juggler in weaving a new act and by a tennis player in winning a tournament" (*SM* 288) emphasizes the motive of winning as a defining feature of all games. Thus Purdy: "Luzhin's defense is nonexistent, and in despair of constructing one he commits suicide—which is hardly, of course, playing the game."[29] Chess games involve a contest between two opposed forces, White and Black, but competition in chess problems is "between the composer and the hypothetical solver" (*SM* 290). The problem may provide for mistakes in the form of inviting false keys, but these are interesting only when a solver has been both interestingly diverted from the problem's solution and amply rewarded with it. That is, the solver of a chess problem isn't meant to lose. In *The Gift*, Fyodor's father, an

explorer and naturalist, argues that the struggle for existence cannot explain the "incredible artistic wit of mimetic disguise" in nature. He tells Fyodor that this mimesis "was too refined for the mere deceiving of accidental predators, feathered, scaled and otherwise (not very fastidious, but then not too fond of butterflies), and seemed to have been invented by some waggish artist precisely for the intelligent eyes of man . . ." (110). The problem solver's relation to the problem composer is like the trained naturalist's to the "waggish artist."

Nabokov is at his most waggish whenever he invites readers to look for chess ideas in his novels or, contrarily, discourages them from doing so. His exchanges with readers of both *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *The Defense* make this point. Elsewhere, I have argued that virtual play, the chess idea that is the main theme of Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* chess problem, figures significantly in many of Nabokov's novels and especially in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *Lolita*.[30] Since I made that case, *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* have been published, and in a postscript to one letter, Nabokov informs Wilson, who has just finished reading *Sebastian Knight*, that "there is *no 'chess-idea' in the development of the whole book.* Sounds attractive, but it is not there" (*NWL* 51). Nabokov's disclaimer, however trustworthy we may deem it as a guide to the novel rather than its author's intention, sounds discouraging, unless Wilson reads literally: there may be a "chess-idea" in the book, but it isn't an idea that operates "*in the development of the whole book.*"

I still maintain that virtual play provides the structure for V.'s quest for Sebastian's last love and for the teasing false leads to Humbert's "crime" in *Lolita*. This relation of novel to chess problem is worth remarking because of the intrinsic interest of virtual play as a theme. As Nabokov's brilliant analysis of this chess idea in *Speak, Memory* suggests, the main interest of a problem involving virtual play shifts from the key move to the virtual key and the tries for which it provides. These tries, or virtual lines of play, constitute a diversionary action replete with "pleasurable torments" carefully prepared for the "sophisticated" solver (*SM* 291). In all his novels, as in his chess problems, Nabokov's aesthetic emphasizes surprise more than difficulty, satisfactions proportional to their elusiveness, and the imaginative release that comes with the contemplation of an ideal realm containing what might have been or almost was.

Nabokov's critics have paid particular attention to chess in *The Defense*, and Nabokov's foreword to the novel, written thirty-four years after its first publication in Russian, famously refers to the "chess effects" he has "planted" in chapters four, five, and six: "The entire sequence of moves in these three central chapters reminds one—or should remind one—of a certain type of chess problem where the point is not merely the finding of a mate in so many moves, but what is termed 'retrograde analysis,' the solver being required to prove from a back-cast study of the diagram position that Black's last move *could not* have been castling or *must* have been the capture of a White Pawn *en passant*" (10). Nabokov's description of this type of chess problem is mislead-

ing. When castling is involved in a problem requiring retrograde analysis, the solver must know that Black cannot castle, that is, that Black has already moved either his king or his rook. When pawn takes pawn *en passant* is involved, the solver must prove that Black's last move brought a pawn from its original square two squares forward. The explanation should have read as follows: "'the solver being required to prove from a back-cast study of the diagram position' that Black is unable to defend himself from a White check by castling because he must have already moved either his king or his rook or 'that Black's last move' must have been the double move of a pawn from the seventh to the fifth rank (thus enabling its capture by a white pawn *en passant* as the key)." Nabokov's confusion cannot result from a lack of familiarity with problems involving retrograde analysis: in 1923, several years before writing *The Defense*, he composed a problem involving retrograde analysis. This problem, a mate in two moves, requires the solver to prove that Black's last move was the double move of a pawn from the seventh to the fifth rank, so that White can play P x P *en passant*.[31]

Perhaps the confusion can be connected to another feature of the foreword critics have noted, Nabokov's direction of his readers' attention to three scenes that do not occur in the novel.[32] Johnson's observations that these scenes "are deliberate traps for the inattentive reader-reviewer" leads him to question the relevance of Nabokov's references to chess problems involving retrograde analysis and those stipulating a sui-mate or self-mate: "these references may be no less bogus than the missing bathroom-tile chessboard scenes."[33] Johnson goes on to make an ingenious case for the "real" relevance of the foreword's reference to a famous mid-nineteenth century match between two grandmasters, Anderssen (World Champion 1851–58) and Kieseritsky. "This game, its players, and the type of moves involved are all central to Nabokov's novel."[34]

Johnson's case for the relevance of the Anderssen/Kieseritsky game and its main feature, the double rook sacrifice, is persuasive. By emphasizing the analogy between one purpose of Anderssen's double rook sacrifice, the diversion of Kieseritsky's Queen, and the absence of Luzhin's fiancée and wife on two critical occasions, he anticipates Boyd's argument about the otherworldly contest for Luzhin's allegiance.[35] But Johnson also provides, though he does not explore, two important pieces of information about the unfortunate Kieseritsky that make his psychological relation to Luzhin pitiably ironic. First, Kieseritsky "had fallen prey to the proffered temptation of the rare double-Rook sacrifice" nine years before his match with Anderssen, in a game against Schwartz. Second, within two years of his defeat by Anderssen, Kieseritsky "was in a mental home, Hôtel de Dieu, where he died on 18 May 1853 and was buried in a pauper's grave."[36] Kieseritsky fails to prepare a defense against a ploy that has defeated him and falls victim to the same ploy nine years later, while Luzhin, who has painstakingly prepared his defense against a ploy that has defeated him, never gets the opportunity to use it because Turati does not repeat himself. Kieseritsky's descent into madness anticipates Luzhin's, as

does the famous persecution complex of Paul Morphy, who became World Champion when he defeated Anderssen in 1858. Nabokov's reference to Kieseritsky and Anderssen glances, once again, at the obsessive exclusivity of chess, its tendency to focus and exhaust the whole intelligence of its most gifted players, and its association with idiosyncratic behavior and mental imbalance. Kieseritsky is well housed in the Hôtel de Dieu because "all art is inutile, and divinely so."

The last scene of *The Defense* offers another analogy to a "king-in-the-corner waiter of the *solus rex* type." Luzhin has locked himself in the bathroom of his apartment, and his dinner guests have been transformed in his mind into a powerful attacking force made up of important fragments of his chess memories. The only exit available to him is the bathroom window, two squares that become the materialization of the larger board in his mind's eye. In one sense, his suicide invalidates an apparent mate, for Luzhin understands that the "only way out" is "to drop out of the game" (252). In another, it confirms the mate, since Luzhin, by the time he drops out of the bathroom window, is already quite mad. His final vision of an eternity of dark and pale squares "obligingly and inexorably spread out before him" (256) reveals "the full horror of the abysmal depths of chess" (139).

If Nabokov imagines Luzhin as the Black King in a "king-in-the-corner waiter of the *solus rex* type" in the novel's last scene, he also imagines him as the White King in a self-mate problem. Johnson objects to Nabokov's comparison of Luzhin's suicide to a sui-mate on the grounds that Luzhin "plays Black in his crucial games" and "normally wears black."[37] But we would be wrong to limit our understanding of Luzhin's fate by requiring that he consistently figure as the Black King. Nabokov isn't reducing his hero to a colored, wooden piece, white or black. His reference to Luzhin's suicide as a sui-mate refines our understanding of Luzhin's fate because *sui-mate* is not a synonym for *suicide*. A problem stipulating a sui-mate doesn't just require the mate of the White instead of the Black King; it requires that this mate occur as the inevitable result of a series of calculated White moves and forced Black responses. Although compelled to operate against his own best interests, White controls the moves of the Black pieces as thoroughly as in any direct mate problem.

The last two chess problems Nabokov published are self-mate problems. One of them, the third-prize winner in *The Problemist*'s 1972–73 Selfmates Award Competition, exemplifies the wit that characterizes Nabokov's best chess compositions.[38] The problem stipulates the mate of the White King in five moves, and the only Black man not pinned or blocked is a Pawn. In one of the problem's two lines of play, this Black Pawn is required to advance steadily towards the White King, who simply awaits his arrival. Meanwhile, White deploys two Bishops, one the consequence of a pawn promotion, to force the indifferent Black Pawn to deliver the mate. In the other line of play, the White King deliberately walks into the corner. The Black Pawn's advance

is blocked after four moves by White's waiting key move, but the White King has meanwhile mobilized another Black Pawn and, at the same time, left that pawn no choice but to deliver the required mate. Several solvers comment on the problem's most interesting feature, its "two amusing surprises" or "two striking variations" or two very "delightful" and "different lines."[39] Such a strategy is witty because it juxtaposes the activity of the humblest piece, the Pawn, with that of the most important piece, the King, while making the most of the single feature they have in common, their limitation to one square per move.

Chess games have always seemed emblematic of the human experience of calculated and audacious conflict. With its inversion of the ordinary rules of the game, the self-mate problem is no less emblematic of a different kind of human experience, one Nabokov touches on when he compares his own efforts to speak about his brother Sergei to "[t]hat twisted quest for Sebastian Knight (1940), with its gloriettes and self-mate combinations" (*SM* 257). Because White is doomed and determined to act self-destructively, the self-mate problem solver's experience, like V.'s or Nabokov's own, is subtly unnerving. It is also profoundly familiar. George Steiner writes that the self-mate problem "dramatizes the essentially suicidal self-destructive meaning of every lost game. The aftermath is abjection, a corrosive humiliation that drags over one whenever the position is recalled and reanalyzed. Hours after play has ended, one wakes to find the night buzzing with jeering forms. The right move was so terribly near, so glaring in its urgent obviousness. . . . Better die than sit down again in front of those torturing squares, than feel again, spiraling up one's bent back and damp neck, the sour burn of defeat. But morning comes, and in the first light the pieces wait, magnetic with the treacherous promise of a better day. 'For what else exists in the world besides chess?'"[40] Steiner is quoting Luzhin, just after his searing vision of "the full horror of the abysmal depths of chess" interrupts his game with Turati (139). In "a fit of lucid madness," Luzhin learns that the horror of chess is inseparable from its harmony. His creator knows that the sterility of chess problems is inseparable from the clarity with which they display "the virtues that characterize all worthwhile art."

Janet Gezari

Notes

1. D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, p. 79.
2. Quoted in ibid., p. 80.
3. Bergery, 1959, p. 4.
4. D.B. Johnson (*Worlds in Regression*, p. 107, n. 6) cites Gleb Struve's comparison of the "formal harmoniousness" of Nabokov's novels to "the regularity of chess moves and the fancifulness of chess combinations."

5. McCarthy, "Vladimir Nabokov's 'Pale Fire'," pp. 74 and 76. McCarthy's claim that there is a chess problem or game in *Pale Fire* is anticipated by Edmund Wilson, who had written Nabokov about *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* in 1941 (when he was still married to McCarthy), asking whether there was a "*'chess-idea' in the development of the whole book.*" (*NWL* 51). See below for a discussion of this exchange.
6. Purdy, pp. 382, 395.
7. Gezari, 1970, 1974, 1987; Gezari and Wimsatt.
8. Boyd, "The Problem of Pattern"; D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, p. 93.
9. Sheidlower.
10. This is only a partial listing of works in which chess games figure. Boyd describes the plots of Nabokov's first play, "Vesnoi" ("In Spring"), written in 1918, which involves a game of chess between a character and fate, and a poem, "Solnechnyi Son" ("The Sun Dream"), written in 1923, in which a champion named Yvain resolves his king's dispute with a neighboring kingdom by winning a ten-game chess tournament (Boyd, 1990, pp. 142, 203).
11. Vladimir Alexandrov (1991, pp. 152, 176) writes about the "network of concealed references to chess" in the novel and makes the point about Nina Rechnoy's maiden name, although he rejects this clue to her identity as Sebastian's last love when he asserts that "it does not seem possible to resolve unequivocally whether or not V. found the right woman."
12. Sheidlower, p. 415.
13. It is cited in Wimsatt's bibliographical note: "An elegant little book edited and published by the Dutch master problemist Dr. M. Niemeijer, *Hoekstenen, A Century of Cornered Kings*, Wassenaar, 1967" (Wimsatt, p. 85).
14. *The Times*, London, Jan. 21, 1970, p. 8.
15. Lipton, Matthews, Rice, pp. 252, 261.
16. *The Problemist*, July, 1972, p. 245, and January 1973, p. 300.
17. Boyd, 1991, p. 575.
18. These problems are listed in Juliar: Nos. 0101, 0104, 0177, 0367, 0368, 0369, 0630, 0650, 0653, 0667, 0668, 0675. In addition, Juliar lists two further problems Nabokov may have published: No. 0372 in *Poslednie novosti* (1932), although no problem has been located at the cited date; and No. 0685 in *The Trinity Review* (1977), although Juliar notes that this problem may be a reprint, "according to Brian Boyd."
19. Boyd, 1990, pp. 166, 205, 514–15.
20. Boyd, 1991, p. 575.
21. Boyd, 1990, p. 137; Boyd, 1991, p. 135.
22. Purdy, p. 380. Purdy's account of "Nabokov and the Chess Novel" is throughout distorted by his failure to distinguish between chess problems and chess games and by his lack of interest in problems.
23. Barbara Smith, p. 262.
24. Andrew Field, quoted in Purdy, p. 383.
25. Bergery, 1959, p. 4.
26. Purdy, p. 382. Purdy quarrels with Nabokov's analysis of his *Speak, Memory* problem, in particular his reference to "three beautiful mates following an answer to disclosed checks by Black": "but there is no third beautiful mate, I fear, since Black has no other piece but his rook with which he can check in less than three moves" (p. 381). Not so. Black can move the Pawn at d7, playing P x Kt, thereby disclosing Black's third check.
27. Wimsatt, p. 78.

28. George Steiner, 1974, pp. 67–8.
29. Purdy, p. 383–84.
30. Gezari, 1974, pp. 96–113.
31. Published in *Rul'* (*The Rudder*), Berlin, April 20, 1923, and not reprinted in *Poems and Problems*.
32. According to D.B. Johnson (*Worlds in Regression*, p. 88), this joke was first noted by Fred Moody in "Nabokov's Gambit," pp. 67–70.
33. D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, p. 88.
34. Ibid., p. 89.
35. Boyd, "The Problem of Pattern," pp. 575–604.
36. D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, p. 89.
37. Ibid., p. 87.
38. *The Problemist*, July–August 1973, p. 350.
39. *The Problemist*, Nov.–Dec. 1973, p. 386.
40. George Steiner, 1974, p. 56.

CORRESPONDENCE

Nabokov's carefully edited public versions of himself make readers thirst all the more for traces of the artless Nabokov, off the stage set of fame and inhabiting a world of inconspicuous and ordinary concerns. His letters provide some of the best evidence of what this man was like.

The recurrence of letters in Nabokov's prose reveals the importance he accorded them in the construction of plot. Nabokov's narratives often turn on the consequences of death or separation, and abound in failed acts of communication. The stories and novels contain examples of a preserved correspondence (the absent heroine's letters in *Mary*), letters that may or may not have been sent (*Laughter in the Dark*), messages from the otherworld ("The Vane Sisters," *Pale Fire*), and, in the case of "Ultima Thule," an entire story consisting of a letter *to* the otherworld. Many of Nabokov's plots are propelled by telegrams, sent and received, and one of the idiotic punishments meted out to the hero of *Invitation to a Beheading* is that he compose letters to nonsensical addressees. Letters help Nabokov's characters break open the chambers of solitude where time and space confine the human soul. In a body of literature dedicated to the metaphorizing of exile, they understandably occupy a central place. Nabokov knew the exile's condition, and in his own life relied heavily on the art of the letter.

This article chiefly deals with the three published collections of Nabokov's correspondence: *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters*, edited by Simon Karlinsky (1979, 1980); *Vladimir Nabokov: Perepiska s sestroi* (*Vladimir Nabokov: A Correspondence with His Sister*), edited by Hélène (Elena) Sikorski (1985); and *Vladimir Nabokov: Selected Letters 1940–1977* (hereafter *Selected Letters*),

edited by Dmitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli (1989). Before looking at each of these volumes, it is important to note what they do *not* include. Many of Nabokov's letters remain in private hands, some of them unseen, some shown to Nabokov researchers with the stipulation that they may be quoted indirectly or only in part. Further, while it contains some correspondence of the "letters to the editor" variety (certain of which appeared, others not), *Selected Letters* reproduces only a fraction of Nabokov's published exchanges with newspapers and journals. The second part of *Strong Opinions* contains eleven letters to periodicals, written between 1961 and 1972 (*SO* 209–220). Through 1985 Michael Juliar had identified more than thirty Nabokov letters that appeared in periodicals and were uncollected elsewhere (mostly from the years 1958–1974). Some of these have since appeared in *Selected Letters* but most have not. The running bibliography of *The Nabokovian* continues to note new discoveries of letters in periodicals. Furthermore, odd items of unpublished correspondence regularly find their way into print.[1] But the three published collections, while containing only a fraction of Nabokov's letters to the editor and an uncertain percentage of the writer's total epistolary output, do represent most of Nabokov's published correspondence to date. Readers can only speculate on the character of the man revealed in the unseen letters.[2]

The stunning dearth of letters from before 1940 is particularly unfortunate. Nabokov's near poverty during the 1920s and 1930s and the dislocation he and his European correspondents suffered during the war years reduce the likelihood that many letters from these decades have survived. Though Nabokov's circumscribed public voice before the war kept his volume of correspondence well below its American and Swiss proportions, it is also the case that some of his pre-war correspondence is extant and has simply not been published. Finally, although all three published volumes of correspondence have appeared since Nabokov's death, the hand of a surviving family member is evident in each and must be reckoned as an additional complicating factor in defining the image of Nabokov portrayed. Simon Karlinsky plans an expanded edition of the Nabokov/Wilson correspondence, and Dmitri Nabokov intends to continue publishing selected letters of his father, but it is unlikely that an unexpurgated edition of all Nabokov's known correspondence will appear soon.

The collection which is at once freest from the editing pressures of kin but most narrowly focused in its subject is Karlinsky's edition of Nabokov's correspondence with the American novelist, essayist, historian, and critic Edmund Wilson. Author of *To the Finland Station*, *Memoirs of Hecate County*, and *Patriotic Gore*, a regular contributor to *The New Republic* and *The New Yorker*, and acclaimed in academic circles for his early and important appraisal of European Symbolism, *Axel's Castle* (1931), Wilson befriended Nabokov within months of his arrival in America in the spring of 1940. The published correspondence between Nabokov and Wilson remains incomplete, and many letters in the Karlinsky volume go unanswered.[3] Readers will also note that the

frequency of exchanges drops off considerably after 1958, in essence making the correspondence a narrative of the nineteen-year interval that comprises Nabokov's American period.

As a partial account of Nabokov's life during the 1940s and 1950s, however, the correspondence succeeds superbly. It describes the search of an already middle-aged émigré writer for stability of all kinds in his new world: financial security, reliable and understanding publishers, a professional sinecure allowing him ample time to write and to pursue lepidoptery, and a world of acquaintances that responded to his need for companionship. As the Nabokov/Wilson correspondence shows, Nabokov early caught the attention of editors and journals, but his position with them was never sure. The Nabokov/Bruccoli volume confirms that even after the American publication of *Lolita*, Nabokov spent a considerable part of his time haggling with publishers, seeking out new editors, and bargaining over fees. Although Wilson himself rarely promoted Nabokov's work in print, he offered the author endless advice on publishing houses.

With a professional excuse for correspondence provided, Nabokov and Wilson quickly found grounds for friendship, but their association would remain curiously and symptomatically unbalanced. From the very first exchanges of letters in 1940, Wilson began lecturing Nabokov on his English, but at the same time started to use him essentially as an unpaid tutor of Russian, turning to the émigré writer for advice on everything from Russian versification theory to minor lexical questions. Wilson wanted to learn enough Russian to read poetry—particularly Pushkin's—in the original, and his letters throughout the 1940s and 1950s contain boyishly boastful demonstrations of his ever-shaky facility. Language, then, gave the two writers a topic, but it also created the unhappy precedent of a relationship based on inequalities. From the outset Wilson and Nabokov appear most comfortable in the positions of master and disciple, never quite finding a basis for friendship that lies outside the exercise of authority. This telling flaw in their relationship would contribute to the rift over Nabokov's English translation of *Eugene Onegin* and end the friendship.

The correspondence is an excellent guide to Nabokov's reading tastes, and is especially useful as an index to Nabokov's reading during the years he worked on *Bend Sinister*, *Speak, Memory*, *Lolita*, *Pnin*, the *Eugene Onegin* edition, and numerous short stories. An indefatigable propagandist for contemporary writers and prodigiously well read himself, Wilson constantly brought to Nabokov's attention both recent American literature and canonical nineteenth-century novels from England and France. Wilson's effect was especially pronounced in the 1940s, when Nabokov was struggling to produce syllabi for his literature courses at Wellesley and Cornell. Nabokov's broad acquaintance with non-Russian literature developed under the direct tutelage of Wilson. Jane Austen and Jean Genet were among the happier discoveries Nabokov owed to Wilson. Henry James, another Wilson "promotion," provoked the Russian's sustained and derisive wrath.

The Nabokov/Wilson correspondence will disappoint those seeking clues to Nabokov's creative process. His letters reveal as little as Mozart's. Matter-of-fact remarks are the rule rather than the exception.[4] Beyond occasional references to the ecstasy and exhaustion that accompanied his spells of intense creativity, Nabokov was largely silent about works in progress. He prized the energy and concentration which composition required, and during the American decades—unlike the succeeding years in Switzerland—successfully husbanded his powers. The lone important clue to Nabokov's writing procedures comes in a letter of 1942. Fresh from a lecture swing through the midwest, Nabokov sends Wilson some character sketches of people he has encountered. The precision and delight with which Nabokov conducts these exercises offers a glimpse of his imagination at work, transforming experience into art (*NWL* 87–89).

The reticence which Nabokov betrays about his own labors is a characteristic trait of the man, but in the case of his friendship with Wilson, it had a special cause. It is difficult to imagine a close relationship between two people with such different political and aesthetic views. Wilson was an enthusiastic and typical child of the American Progressive Era, and like many writers of the time, including Lincoln Steffens, Granville Hicks, and Theodore Dreiser, developed a myopically forgiving view of the Bolshevik experiment in Russia. He also used his Soviet sympathies as a vehicle for articulating a typically American impatience with European class distinctions. Wilson became increasingly irritated by Nabokov's suspect opinions, whose origins he believed to have found in the arrogance of the Russian pre-revolutionary aristocracy. Holding himself to be a "liberal" in the mold of nineteenth-century Russia's reformers, caught between the immoderate practices of both left and right, Nabokov was offended to find himself a "conservative" in America because of his anti-Bolshevism. Wilson and Nabokov little tolerated the other's political views, and neither showed much interest in the genesis of those views, though Nabokov, to his credit, at least offered Wilson the necessary background facts.

The writers' tastes in literature offered a second obstacle to intimacy. Though Wilson's likes were eclectic enough, he remained a disconcertingly obtuse, almost clumsy reader of Nabokov, ignoring or misreading the many puzzles of plot that dominate Nabokov's work, and striding blithely over the trapdoors that open on profundity. (Wilson also had to wait until the 1960s, when the friendship was effectively over, for most of Nabokov's Russian work to appear in English. When he finally read the Russian novels, Wilson found them "rather disappointing."[5]) As a reader Wilson was an author's nightmare, unable to appreciate the fundamental blocks on which Nabokov rested his art: unstated and explosive emotion; elaborate and potentially incriminating acts of complicity established between characters, narrator, and reader; and the collision of rival imaginative fields. *Bend Sinister*, for example, Wilson found to be an awkward and incredible political tale (*NWL* 183). He could not

understand the careful effects of alienation that dominate *Lolita* and found the situations "unreal," constructed with a "cleverness . . . [that] becomes tiresome" (*NWL* 288). In the winter of 1952 Wilson had insulted Nabokov by refusing to read the story "Lance" for a reason that was less logical than rude, and five years later an exchange of letters over Nabokov's draft translation of *Eugene Onegin* swiftly turned into an unpleasant quarrel about the other's ignorance of Russian/English. Already burdened by Wilson's flat reaction to *Lolita*, the friendship was doomed. In 1965 the writers aired their differences over *Eugene Onegin* with all the venom of two sworn enemies, and Wilson's caricature of a splenetic Nabokov and his unforgiving wife in the 1971 memoir *Upstate* destroyed the friendship for good.[6]

What does the Wilson correspondence tell us about Nabokov? Any conclusion must take into account the addressee. Nabokov's laconic references to Wilson's divorce and the fate of his own brothers bespeaks less an emotional frigidity than the reserve characteristic of a male friendship of fifty years ago (*NWL* 156). Though genuine and warm, Nabokov's frequent inquiries about Wilson's family are unvaryingly reticent. The two men appeared to prefer correspondence to meetings, and apologies abound—especially on Nabokov's part—for missed opportunities to visit. The letters are filled with plaintive recitations of ill health. With Wilson Nabokov is only mildly interested in discussing contemporary affairs, and in a reference to the Teheran Conference symptomatically describes the meeting as if it were material for a short story (*NWL* 117). Aside from declaring a liberal's opposition to Bolshevism and capital punishment, Nabokov takes few public stands. He shows indifference, if not hostility, to the predicaments of other Russian émigré authors, and betrays his prejudice against women writers when he makes a noisy exception for Austen.

Wilson and Nabokov rarely risk the intimate disclosure, and when they do, their openness seems to pass unacknowledged. In a letter from 1945 Wilson admits that "our conversations have been among the few consolations of my literary life," a remark for which Nabokov has no reply (*NWL* 149). By 1950 Wilson is clearly enervated by the lengthy ruminations on Chekhov and other writers which had come to dominate their letters, and confesses to being "tired of all these topics" (*NWL* 250). After this letter, Nabokov loosens up, but slowly. He interrupts himself to announce an imminent departure for the soccer field, registers a lengthy and uncharacteristically emotional complaint against *Harper's*, and begins to indulge himself in stories of his son's achievements. By 1952 he can cry with unusual passion, "I am sick of teaching, I am sick of teaching, I am sick of teaching" (*NWL* 270). But it is Wilson's turn not to respond, and in the same winter he fails to read "Lance." The window to greater intimacy closes.

There are a few disappointments to the Nabokov/Wilson correspondence. Readers miss having Nabokov's letter of condolence on the death of Wilson's mother. Only two letters survive from the eventful year 1959.

Nabokov and Wilson never flesh out some tantalizing references to the New Critics (*NWL* 278, 281). But the rewards of the letters are great. They lie chiefly in the passing comment—Nabokov's casual 1964 reference to America as "home," or his surmisal that Chekhov's stories contain the "things that gentle King Lear proposed to discuss in prison with his daughter" (*NWL* 298). Though Wilson wearies of the topic, Nabokov never passes up an opportunity to reflect on the edifice in which he lives and works, the Russian literary tradition.

In his sister Nabokov found, next to his wife, his most devoted reader. Born in 1906, Elena emigrated with the family in 1919, and moved from Berlin to Prague with her mother in 1923. She remained in Czechoslovakia through the war years, settling in Geneva in 1948 to work in a library affiliated with the United Nations. She did not see her brother between 1937 and 1959, the year Nabokov returned to Europe. Married to Vsevolod Viacheslavovich Sikorsky and widowed in 1958, she had a son Vladimir, nicknamed "Zhikochka," born in 1939. Through the Nabokov sisters' nanny, Evgeniia Gofel'd (Hofeld), Elena and her brother were able to reestablish contact in 1945. They corresponded frequently until their reunion in 1959, thereafter having little occasion to write. (Nabokov chose to live in Montreux partly because Elena was only an hour's drive away.) Elena published her correspondence with Nabokov in 1985, eight years after her brother's death. The letters span the period 1945–1974.

Appended to the Sikorski collection are five letters—two from the 1930s, one from 1945, and two from the mid-1950s—which Nabokov wrote his brother Kirill (1911–1964). In the letters from the 1930s Nabokov plays the mildly nagging older brother, lecturing the nascent poet Kirill on matters of prosody in words that brook no opposition. By the 1950s Nabokov has abandoned the pose of superiority and writes affectionately to a brother with whom he had little in common. "Have you written anything lately?" Nabokov asks twice, casting about for a topic.[7] The five letters to Kirill deservedly remain the appendix to a far more illuminating body of letters.

Elena Sikorski provided Nabokov with all that Wilson could not: a love of Russian literature matched with a knowledge of Russia itself, a common memory of the Nabokovs' childhood in Petersburg, and a quick, passionate poetic sensibility. Her brother's equal in acuity, she excelled in the virtue which eluded him, a capacity for selflessness.

If Edmund Wilson remained outside the gravitational attraction of Nabokov's fiction, Elena Sikorski revolved like a close satellite about her brother's sun. As the beloved kid sister, Elena had laboriously helped her teenaged brother complete his metrical charts (HS 62). The Bible to which she resorts for wisdom and for metaphors in her letters is *Invitation to a Beheading*. For decades she has dreamed of the return of the Nabokovs' murdered father in images "borrowed" from *The Gift*. The diction she uses to express the pain of separation reflects Nabokov's own prose (HS 75). In her brother Elena sees

a spiritual mate. "We share one soul, split into two halves," she would echo Plato in 1946 (HS 38). Nine years later, in a letter composed at work, she would write that "There is absolutely no one here with the slightest understanding of what we love" (HS 83). Never voicing a word of criticism for any of Nabokov's work, Elena draws a charmed circle around herself and her brother, placing beyond it the profane world of mistaken and ignorant readers. Nabokov tacitly refuses to join this cult of himself, but the unconditional acceptance which Elena offers him creates an unrivalled arena for epistolary self-revelation.

If the correspondence bound Elena to a partner in spirit, it offered Nabokov a voice of the past, a family factotum, and a friend. "I cannot escape feeling," Elena writes in the opening letter of the correspondence, "that I find myself in some special world. I feel ancient and wise, and remember everything" (HS 9). Nabokov would rely on this memory. When working on *Speak,Memory* he pressed her for details of their childhood, and in 1973, as he wrote *Look at the Harlequins!*, commissioned Elena—by then making yearly trips to Russia to visit friends—to record details of the Soviet world he had never seen (HS 56–61, 65).[8]

While Nabokov lived in America, Elena served as his link to family. A matter of months after the correspondence began, Nabokov began sending a monthly stipend to Evgeniia Hofeld. He also regularly sent money to his sister Olga, and for years, through Elena, tried to help Olga's ne'er-do-well son. Nearly every letter to Elena brims with worries over the fate of the extended Nabokov family. Once settled in Switzerland in the 1960s, Nabokov no longer needed an on-the-spot family lieutenant, but on one memorable occasion in 1967 had Elena come to Montreux to step in for his absent wife. In a detailed letter accompanied by a floor plan of the Nabokovs' suite, he describes the services he expects from her: "a neat appearance, brewing the morning coffee (VN drinks two cups), morning calls to tradesmen . . ." (HS 113).

One will never know how important Elena's friendship was to Nabokov, but to biographers it is critical. Here, more than anywhere in the published correspondence, Nabokov not only vents his feelings but truly engages the life of another. To be sure, exchanges reminiscent of the Wilson correspondence take up their share of space: ongoing complaints about the drudgery of *Onegin;* shared delight at the *éclat* of the French *Lolita;* common disdain for *Doctor Zhivago*, the work of a "blissful Bolshevik" (HS 90, 93, 97, 99). But Nabokov and his sister go beneath this easy surface. They frequently write to each other as parents, by turns proud of their sons' school triumphs and horrified at the boat races, fast cars, and mountain climbing that occupy the leisure time of adolescent boys (HS 76, 81).

Nabokov writes with unusual directness. In America, he tells Elena in 1945, "my most sacred dreams have been realized . . . My family life is completely cloudless. I love this country and dearly want to bring you over. Alongside lapses into wild vulgarity there are heights here where one can have

marvelous picnics with friends who 'understand'" (HS 18). Better than almost any passage in his work these phrases capture Nabokov's feelings for America—down to the ambiguous use of "understand." In a clarion appeal for Elena's sympathy, he describes in detail his daily schedule (HS 23–26, 29). Nabokov can share the news that he has become "wonderfully fat" and resembles the rotund Russian writer Apukhtin (HS 26). He can boast repeatedly that butterflies bear his name, gently reproach Elena for causing him a minor embarrassment over money, and tease his sister for her reverse snobbery in choosing squalid hotel quarters (HS 55, 63, 68, 107–110). He responds compassionately to news of the death of Elena's husband, sends Olga's son clothes, and apologetically confesses that straitened circumstances have forced him to consider reducing by five dollars his monthly check to Evgeniia Hofeld (HS 94, 67). In these letters one begins to seize the man.

Eager to confide in Elena, and willing to share the vicissitudes of his careers as author, scientist, and family man, Nabokov emerges as a devoted friend and loving brother. The martinet peeks through occasionally. The humor of outraged chivalry in the argument over Elena's hotel and the mock pedantic tone of his 1967 letter of introduction to the Montreux suite do not quite cloak Nabokov's tacit expectation that he will be obeyed. And words sometimes fail him. He gingerly approaches the topic of his brother Sergei, who perished in a German camp at Neuengamme. Responding with deep horror to the sickening revelations of Nuremberg, Nabokov never mentions Sergei, though he and his sister share the unspoken thought. The tribute of a surviving brother in *Drugie berega* would also be stammering and brief. Even in the final version of *Speak, Memory*, despite a declaration that Sergei's is "one of those lives that hopelessly claim a belated something," Nabokov devotes more time to Sergei's tennis game than to his own feelings (*Drugie berega* 101; *SM* 257–258).

Unlike the Wilson volume, Nabokov's correspondence with Elena has the air of a fragment. The text abounds in suppressed passages, and at best does only partial justice to a relationship that would have its own second chapter after 1959. Furthermore, the letters never help one decode the objectless and enigmatic phrase "friends who 'understand'." Does Nabokov refer to those who understand his past? his works? Nabokov himself? Or does he esteem friends who, simply, understand a great deal? The letters cannot answer, because to Nabokov Elena represented all of these.[9]

In 1989 Nabokov's son Dmitri collaborated with Matthew Bruccoli to edit the third posthumous volume of Nabokov's correspondence, *Vladimir Nabokov: Selected Letters, 1940–1977*. It includes English translations of seven of Nabokov's published letters to Elena and all but one of his letters to Kirill, as well as a 1970 postcard-with-poem to his sister which she did not print in her 1985 edition. A handful of letters in the collection cover Nabokov's time in Berlin and Paris, but the volume is chiefly dedicated to the years after 1940.

Because it makes only rare efforts to include respondents' letters, *Selected Letters* does not, properly speaking, belong with Nabokov's correspondence. As a rostrum from which the son allows his father's letters to speak, it comes closer to being a second volume of *Strong Opinions*. The range of letters in *Selected Letters* makes it the richest archive of all Nabokov's published correspondence, but the latitude taken by its editors in comprising their "selection" also poses dangers.

Readers unfamiliar with the correspondence practices of twentieth-century writers will be stunned at the volume of letters Nabokov wrote his publishers. He usually served as his own agent. Letters show that he placed "The Ballad of Longwood Glen" with *The New Yorker* only by refusing to take their earlier "no" for an answer (*SL* 201, 208–209). Responding to requests from the Guggenheim Foundation for names of nominees, Nabokov provides two candidates, one of them himself (*SL* 188–89). The letters show Nabokov to be a jealous guardian of his financial rights and a careful student of contracts. His marvelously disingenuous "I am no businessman" comes in the midst of a tortuous and illuminating correspondence touching on every detail of the publication of *Lolita* (*SL* 235). Once garlanded with the success of his book, he proposes that Putnam's publish "The Enchanter" "in a limited numbered edition at a rather steep price" (*SL* 283). Nabokov became an adept at a game forced upon American writers.

The sheer number of letters devoted to details of book design reveals one of Nabokov's obsessions. He saw the book cover not as a marketing device but as an interpretive statement controlling a reader's entry into the work. For *Lolita* Nabokov adamantly insisted on "pure colors, melting clouds . . . and no girls" (*SL* 256). Appalled at the "pseudochildish drawing" proposed for *Invitation to a Beheading*, Nabokov substituted his son's sketch (*SL* 344). The need to supervise all aspects of his works reflected a deeper demand for control. Afraid that his signature would simply be sold, he gave few autographs (*SL* 265). As readers of *Strong Opinions* know, he would not allow use of casual comments he considered "unfit for publication" (*SO* xv; *SL* 395–96). His secrecy over *Lolita* in the years before publication reflects not only an understandable apprehension about its reception but an apparent desire to orchestrate its effect, even on friends and editors. The final novel *Look at the Harlequins!* and the "fictitious reviewer" of the discarded last chapter of *Speak, Memory* (*SL* 95) show that even within the literary work Nabokov was tempted to control his readers' impressions.

Nabokov also emerges in this correspondence as a professional "man of letters," his chief guise in the Nabokov–Wilson correspondence. His image in the later collection only traces more deeply the pattern set in the first. The list of hated authors expands. D.H. Lawrence, Sartre, Pound, and the familiar Pasternak come in for repeated beatings, but Thomas Mann is the central enemy. Nabokov also indulges in numerous quarrels in print. Indeed feuds come to occupy a disconcertingly large part of the correspondence after 1960.

Selected Letters contains representative letters dealing with four special objects of Nabokov's wrath: his biographer Andrew Field, Edmund Wilson, Robert Lowell, and the French publisher of *Lolita*, Maurice Girodias. But Nabokov could be the playful literary celebrity as well. He indulged in witty letters to the editor, asked the *International Herald Tribune* to drop a character in one of its comic strips, and in a contest sponsored by *Encounter*, congratulated the readers who deciphered "The Vane Sisters." Most of Nabokov's uncollected published correspondence consists of letters to the editor on various political and literary topics.

Synopses of various novels in *Selected Letters* offer some insight into Nabokov's compositional priorities. "Most of the stories I am contemplating," he writes an editor in 1951, ". . . will be composed . . . according to [the] system wherein a second (main) story is woven into, or placed behind, the superficial semitransparent one" (*SL* 117). Nabokov's focus is on personality and mental processes rather than action—*Despair* is "concerned with subtle dissections of a mind," *Bend Sinister* with "certain subtle achievements of the mind," and *Pnin* with "a character entirely new to literature . . . important and intensely pathetic" (*Selected Letters* 17, 48, 178). Only *Pale Fire* appears on the drafting board as an adventure tale (*SL* 212–13). In his privileging of character Nabokov remained anchored in the classical tradition of the nineteenth-century European novel.

As a window on history *Selected Letters* yields little. An isolated telegram to Lyndon Johnson does not illuminate the motives of the sender (*SL* 378). Nabokov writes Solzhenitsyn but does not meet him, and the correspondence is dropped (*SL* 527–28). The dates of certain letters, however, sometimes convey their own irony: in 1949 Nabokov shares the world's ignorance of the fate of the important Russian critic D.S. Mirsky, who died in Stalin's camps in the late 1930s, and in 1953, writing from Arizona, Nabokov tells Harry Levin that "no Switzerlands could lure me away from Painted Canyon" (*SL* 91, 137).

What *Selected Letters* does reveal, unlike the preceding two collections, is Nabokov's versatility at the desk. He can engage in limerick exchanges with his Cornell friend Morris Bishop (*SL* 141–42), pen affectionate postscripts to his wife's letters to Dmitri, write murderous threats to copyright infringers with a lawyer's cold politeness, and display the poisonous eloquence of a professor of literature conducting a private war in the high-brow press. Nabokov's English epistolary style began stilted and stuffy, as letters from the 1930s show (*SL* 15–17), but within a few years of his arrival in America he thoroughly mastered the medium and developed the letter genre into a hugely resonant form of expression.

Much more the public figure than he is in the correspondence with Wilson or Elena Sikorski, the Nabokov of *Selected Letters* does not invite closeness. Spontaneity often fails. A 1956 letter to his Viking editor Pascal

Covici repeats verbatim several sentences about *Lolita* he used in a letter to Morris Bishop three weeks before (*SL* 184–85). As a letter to the critic Richard Schickel shows, Nabokov is capable of enormous grace when properly stroked (*SL* 239–40), but unmercifully contemptuous of those with whom he disagrees. In a man who disdained to let moral questions suffocate his fiction, one often hears the heavy accents of self-righteousness. He chides Roman Jakobson, the distinguished Russian émigré philologist and professor at Harvard, for making return visits to the Soviet Union: "Frankly, I am unable to stomach your little trips to totalitarian countries" (*SL* 216). And with disturbing frequency Nabokov parades his own code of behavior. Rejections of honorary degrees typically become pronouncements about this code (*SL* 507, 559). Strangers writing Nabokov are often made to feel that they have breached a certain decorum, and then told why. In a letter to the *New York Times Book Review* directed at Edmund Wilson, Nabokov would write his own epigraph to this side of the *Selected Letters*: ". . . In the struggle between the dictates of compassion and those of personal honor the latter wins" (*SL* 494).

Nabokov's formality partly reflects the manner of a European gentleman. But his aloofness grows with time. The pressures of fame bring out Nabokov's skills at self-disengagement, and it is appropriate that after 1960 his wife would take over much of his correspondence. Her letters tend to soften considerably the impact of her husband's fulminations, but the curious free indirect discourse of her style is still haunted by Nabokov's voice: "My husband thanks you for the opportunity offered to answer Edmund Wilson's letter. He does not think that pitiful little letter rates a rejoinder" (*SL* 385).

Other letters flesh out the complexities of Nabokov. He shows a residual prejudice against women in professional capacities (*SL* 41, 468, 470). Letters to Véra in 1937 and to Dmitri from the 1960s and 1970s reveal the adoring husband and doting parent, though a reading of the letters to Véra must be tempered by knowledge that Nabokov was simultaneously conducting an anguished love affair on the side.[10] Miscellaneous surprises dot the volume: thoughts of suicide (over psoriasis and his 1937 infidelity) (*SL* 26); deference to the aged Bunin, whom he disliked (*SL* 119); a fascinated admiration for Israel in his later years (*SL* 476, 480, 509, 522); a failed movie project with Alfred Hitchcock (*SL* 361–66); and—an opinion that will be debated forever—the unqualified declaration in 1969 that his "best work was done in English" (*SL* 454).

Selected Letters inevitably whets more than sates the reader's appetite. One longs to know if any further correspondence survives with the idiosyncratic and brilliant translator Bernard Gilbert Guerney; one wants the "complete correspondence" with Morris Bishop. Is there a record anywhere of Kirill Nabokov's reactions to *Lolita*, characterized by Nabokov as "the most intelligent and artistic ones yet made" (HS 124; *SL* 183)? While copious and useful notes help contextualize the letters' many references, the choice of letters itself is occasionally mystifying. Editorial decisions also create some unneces-

sary syncopes. Certain letters to Dmitri are hard to place, and readers often need the letter that provoked Nabokov's reply (*SL* 298, 322, 87). Inclusion of a Cornell course description and a letter from Véra Nabokov to Burma Shave alter the implicit scope of the collection (*SL* 238–39, 137–38).

A "selected" correspondence cannot be impartial. It is a "biography through letters." Through their deletions and omissions, both the editors and those who hold the letters inescapably direct the reading. This is particularly true of the *Selected Letters*. The many letters on butterflies, fortified by a few rebarbative editorial notes defending his scientific expertise, solidify Nabokov's standing as a lepidopterist. Hostile letters are occasionally accompanied by hostile notes, showing the son's stake in righting a family wrong. But the information the notes provide can stand by itself, and the comments rarely become intrusive. Despite its gaps, the Karlinsky edition of the Wilson correspondence suppresses very little of its contents and most nearly approaches completeness. Elena Sikorski has deleted more, and it is likely that a greater share of the correspondence is lost or simply not included.

Taken together, the three volumes of Nabokov correspondence come closer than any of his writings to letting the author speak for himself. In the letters to Wilson and Elena Sikorski, and in most of the correspondence in *Selected Letters,* Nabokov is writing off the record. To be sure, Nabokov's aquaintances offer more personal testaments about the man than his own letters ever quite provide, but the partiality of these documents prevents taking them as neutral information. Immense reverence colors the reminiscences of former students like Alfred Appel and Hannah Green.[11] Zinaida Shakhovskaia's memoir, on the contrary, is tainted by a self-confessed animus.[12]

What composite does the published correspondence create? The very complexity of the final portrait shows the utility of these letters in helping readers understand Nabokov. But the persistence of a few themes does allow some conclusions. Nabokov's relationship with his wife and son was charged with an exceptional energy and the passion of unconditional devotion. In an attenuated state this devotion, deprived of its electricity, radiated outward to include both siblings and close friends. But one often has to infer the structure and intensity of these bonds on the basis of fragmentary evidence. Nabokov's closest relationships—with Véra and Dmitri, with the Bishops in Ithaca—were not conducted by letter. Outside this supportive circle Nabokov generally maintained a European's courtesy and detachment. But the courtesy could be broken. When Nabokov saw that his own professional fortunes were jeopardized or that others had violated his ethical standards, he reacted with the acidity of an articulate and malevolent don. Indeed the perimeter of Nabokov's circle of intimacy was defined by the presence or absence of forbearance. Nabokov generally did not forgive sins committed by those outside his circle. Just as consistently he exhibited great tolerance for those within. An extremely disciplined writer, possessed of an unusual gift for concentration, Nabokov created a small and secure environment where he could use his titanic writing

energy to the fullest. He helped other writers from time to time, but less so than many of his contemporaries. He read avidly, but exhibited little interest in people who did not approach him through his own works. Outside his narrow circle he was unable, or perhaps simply unwilling, to enter sympathetically into the concerns of another.

If Nabokov built a world designed principally to shut out distraction, readers of the correspondence cannot help but conclude that in his later years he managed to distract himself with his own compulsions. One sees traces of this propensity in the Wilson letters. It emerges full blown in *Selected Letters* after 1955, the year the French *Lolita* appeared. Nabokov had the special ability to see himself as a character in a literary work, and this capacity, combined with his own perfectionism, led him to worry endlessly about others—"hack artists," as it were—botching his portrait. When he became famous, Nabokov discovered that he was the only one of his characters over whom he did not have complete control. Hot letters to the editor correcting errors and answering slights become a characteristic feature of his correspondence from Switzerland. Nabokov's perfectionism led him to another distraction, one that for his readers had a tragic price. His need to closely supervise translations of his novels cost him precious creative years at the end of his life.

With Brian Boyd's two-volume biography of Nabokov available, the published Nabokov correspondence loses some of its force. Boyd wrote with knowledge of all three collections and saw correspondence that has yet to make its way into print. But the letters still have their uses. Standing alone, outside the weave of a biographer's narration, they have an immediacy which the best of biographies will fail to convey. The Wilson and Sikorski correspondences have the focused power of a dialogue and present a mind in the moment of communicating to another the totality of its fascinations. Here Nabokov can be boring or bored, pedantic or brilliant. His personality rises from the banality and exhaustion of everyday experience and survives like a bright object on a matte backdrop. The *Selected Letters* also has its place. While designed to present a striking likeness of the man, with all tedium excised, the sheer variety of its letters creates a bold collage effect, giving the reader as large and suggestively incomplete a sense of Nabokov as the earlier two volumes produce polished miniatures. All the volumes are a reminder, though, that accumulated knowledge of a personality leads in an infinite regress toward more mysteries, a principle Nabokov well understood in his fiction. As he wrote regarding a potential interview two years before his death, "My soul is mine. What you are going to get is an elegant and accurate shadowgraph" (*SL* 551).

John M. Kopper

NOTES

1. Letters published since Michael Juliar's 1986 bibliography include: four in *Minuvshee* 8 (1989), pp. 274–81 (reprinted and translated by Gennady Barabtarlo in *The Nabokovian* 24 [Spring, 1990], pp. 15–23, with an additional letter); six (five by Nabokov) edited by Gennady Barabtarlo for *The Nabokovian* 28 (Spring, 1992), pp. 66–74.
2. Zoran Kuzmanovich has supplemented information on Nabokov's unpublished correspondence with his description of the holdings of the Library of Congress, the Washington University Libraries, and the Bakhmeteff Archive: *The Nabokovian* 19 (Fall, 1987), pp. 12–22. A detailed catalogue of the Nabokov archive now housed in the Berg Collection of The New York Public Library would help immeasurably in sorting out the unpublished correspondence.
3. After Karlinsky's collection had gone to press, Nabokov's widow discovered an additional sixty to seventy letters from the correspondence. Simon Karlinsky intends to publish these letters in a new edition of the Nabokov/Wilson correspondence, and the additions will remedy many lacunae in the 1980 revised edition. The new expanded edition will include Wilson's letters to Nabokov from the end of the war, some letters of recommendation which Wilson wrote for Nabokov, and letters written shortly after Nabokov's arrival in America discussing their collaborative translation of Pushkin's "Mozart and Salieri."
4. See references to *Bend Sinister*, for example (*NWL* 168). The pagination in the 1979 and 1980 editions of *NWL* is identical.
5. Wilson, 1972, p. 232.
6. Wilson, 1971, pp. 156–62.
7. Sikorski, p. 124; cf. p. 123. Hereafter, all references to Hélène Sikorski's volume will be given in the text in the form: (HS page numbers[s]). All translations from the Russian are mine.
8. See also Boyd, 1991, pp. 605, 619.
9. In 1966, responding to an interviewer's question, Nabokov would declare that he felt "fairly comfortable" in the company of American intellectuals who had read his books (*SO* 98).
10. Boyd, 1990, pp. 433–44.
11. Hannah Green, "Mister Nabokov," in Quennell, pp. 34–41; Alfred Appel, Jr., in McGraw, pp. 5–10; Alfred Appel, Jr., "Remembering Nabokov," in Quennell, pp. 11–33; Alfred Appel, Jr., "Nabokov: A Portrait," in Rivers and Nicol, pp. 3–21.
12. See Shakhovskaia.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Vladimir Nabokov was a remarkably prolific author throughout his career, and to this day his literary estate continues to issue previously unpublished writings. A scant twenty-five years ago the amount of critical attention Nabokov had received was undeservedly slight. Today, however, the situation

has been rectified. The critical bibliography is now comparable in size and range to his own voluminous *oeuvre*. Indeed, few, if any, contemporary writers have attracted an equal volume of commentary.

The first recorded critical comments on Nabokov's writings were remarks regarding a poem of his published in a 1916 edition of a mimeographed school magazine.[1] But it was only during the 1920s and 1930s, when his works were appearing regularly in Russian émigré newspapers and journals, that he attracted serious critical attention. In this early stage of his career, while residing and writing in England, Germany, and France, Nabokov had only a small audience. "In the first flush of my so-called fame," he wrote, "just before World War II around, say, 1938, in Paris where my last novel written in Russian started to run in an émigré magazine I used to visualize my audience with tender irony, as a small group of my émigré fans, each with one of my books held in his hands like a hymnal, all this in the rather subdued light of a back room in a cafe."[2] During this period there were, broadly speaking, two divergent views of his merits. Critics worried over the question of the degree to which his writings seemed consistent with the interests of the emigration and the degree to which they continued the values and ideals of the Russian literary tradition as understood by the elders in the émigré community. One faction considered him alien (that is, un-Russian) in style and theme. The other praised his new voice.[3] While the dispute in its context now appears parochial, Simon Karlinsky and others have taken pains to show how Nabokov's art—far from betraying, as it were, his heritage—actually continues an important line which runs from Pushkin through Chekhov.[4] Though such an understanding was not expounded in those early years, some critics did offer important insights. Vladislav Khodasevich, for one, observed that the life of the artist and the life of a device in the consciousness of the artist were Nabokov's concerns,[5] and Vladimir Weidle proposed that art itself was Nabokov's grand theme.[6] Highest praise for the young author was exemplified in Nina Berberova's remarks upon discovering Nabokov in 1929: "A great Russian writer, like a phoenix, was born from the fire and ashes of revolution and exile. Our existence from now on acquired a meaning. All my generation were justified. We were saved."[7]

It was only after Nabokov took up residence in the United States and after his subsequent nearly exclusive adoption of the English language in his writings that his audience grew and moved from the back room of the cafe into a reasonably large auditorium. But it was not until the explosion of *Lolita*, with its attendant national and international notoriety, that the auditorium overflowed. Readers and reviewers alike suddenly discovered the mid-career Nabokov, and the polemics began as to the nature and value of his work. Consummate artist or sterile stylist? The new James Joyce or the player of pointless games? Nabokov the writer often became entangled with Nabokov the celebrity, the object of numerous exquisite interviews and the espouser of strong opinions. With the passing of years and the simultaneous growth of his

oeuvre from both ends—early works translated from Russian and new works written in English—his reputation grew, but not without difficulty. "Nobody can decide," he wrote, "if I am a middle-aged American writer, or an old Russian writer—or an ageless international freak" (*SO* 106).

Apart from the occasional review or notation of books in print, serious English language criticism of Nabokov dates to the many reviews and essays which accompanied and followed the American publication of *Lolita*. Page Stegner's *Escape into Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (1966) was the first book-length study of Nabokov's writings. Stegner argued that Nabokov's central concern was the finding of one's immortal soul through artistic creation. Though never intended in a pejorative way, the title of Stegner's book delighted Nabokov detractors who would claim that Nabokov disdained the real world and the social man, preferring to flee to some supposedly purer realm of solitary aesthetic bliss. A more important volume the following year was *Nabokov: His Life in Art* (1967), in which Andrew Field presented the full array of Nabokov's writings to that date, the volume and variety of which had been known to few readers. Field's work set the table, as it were, at which following commentators could feed. And though much subsequent criticism has taken issue with Field's scholarship and critical judgment, his pioneering book deserves recognition for having illuminated Nabokov's many guises—poet, playwright, short story writer, translator, novelist, scholar, lepidopterist, critic, essayist, memoirist, teacher.

That same year, the compiler of the first checklist of Nabokov criticism, noting Nabokov's substantial bibliography and commenting on the lamentable state of Nabokov studies, remarked that "the complaint cannot be raised with Nabokov that critics have not got a sufficient body of work in print to permit worthwhile assessments. The corpus is there; the burden now rests with those critics who are willing and able to take up the challenges of its complexities."[8] This they subsequently did in great numbers. A checklist today will show more than fifty books, fifteen critical anthologies and special journal issues, hundreds of articles and essays, thousands of reviews, and more than forty doctoral dissertations devoted in whole or part to Nabokov. This extensive body of critical commentary, produced over a twenty-five year period, has concentrated primarily on Nabokov's novels. A single volume devoted to his entire collected poetry, drama, or short stories has not yet been written. The criticism published to date has focused in large part on the elucidation of complexities of structure, narration, and style; polemics regarding the presence or absence of a moral/ethical center to his writings; a delineation of the metaliterary character of his *oeuvre;* and, most recently, an interest in his metaphysics. Characteristic of this substantial body of criticism is the high calibre of literary critics who have been attracted to Nabokov scholarship.

What follows is a brief descriptive enumeration, by type and in chronological order of publication, of the nearly sixty published volumes in the

English language in today's Nabokov critical bibiliography, with mention of several written in other languages. It is of course impossible to note the hundreds of articles and essays which have been published, but some of the best of these have been anthologized in the collections which are cited.

Overviews of Nabokov's Writings

Only two persons have attempted to treat Nabokov's entire *oeuvre* comprehensively. Field's *Nabokov: His Life in Art*, while an important pioneering work, has proven to be incomplete and inaccurate, and subsequent commentary has gone well beyond his textual readings. His later *Nabokov: His Life in Part* (1977) and *VN: The Life and Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (1986) are equally idiosyncratic, incomplete, inaccurate, and unreliable. In every respect they are supplanted by Brian Boyd's two volumes, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years* (1990) and *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (1991). Boyd has written not only a superb definitive biography of Nabokov but also a comprehensive, cohesive critical evaluation of all of his writings. A useful visual complement to Boyd's work is Ellendea Proffer's *Nabokov: A Pictorial Biography* (1990).

Books on the Novels

The range of critics' interests and approaches has been broad and varied. Julian Moynahan's *Vladimir Nabokov* (1971), though pamphlet sized, offers sufficiently astute readings of several novels that it remains frequently cited in subsequent criticism. W.W. Rowe's *Nabokov's Deceptive World* (1971) is a study of some stylistic devices in Nabokov's fiction, and includes the now-famous section on sexual symbols to which Nabokov strenuously objected. In *Crystal Land* (1972), Julia Bader offers a textual analysis of the first six English novels emphasizing the theme of artistic creation. Douglas Fowler, in *Reading Nabokov* (1974), attempts to reduce Nabokov's fictions to four thematic, moral, and narrative constants through the examination of only three stories and five novels. In *Fictitious Biographies: Vladimir Nabokov's English Novels* (1977), Herbert Grabes contends that all of Nabokov's English novels are fictitious biography or autobiography, and thus all deal with the relationship between art and life. *Vladimir Nabokov* (1976) by L.L. Lee is a concise and useful volume in the Twayne authors' series and the first of several general surveys of Nabokov's fiction.

In *Vladimir Nabokov: America's Russian Novelist* (1977), G.M. Hyde presents a well-balanced overview of the novels, with particular reference to their place in the Russian literary tradition. Donald Morton's *Vladimir Nabokov* (1978), a volume in the Modern Literature Monographs series, offers a general survey introduction to Nabokov's English fiction. As suggested by the title, *Nabokov: The Dimensions of Parody* (1978) is Dabney Stuart's

treatment of parody (the novel as play, film, joke, biography) as a configuring feature in several of the Russian and English novels.

A landmark in Nabokov criticism, Ellen Pifer's *Nabokov and the Novel* (1980) presents the first cogent and comprehensive demonstration of the strong moral underpinnings of Nabokov's fictional worlds. In *Nabokov's Spectral Dimension* (1981), W.W. Rowe attempts a somewhat heavy-handed identification of various spectres and spirits inhabiting Nabokov's fiction, thus foreshadowing later critical interest in Nabokov's metaphysics. David Packman's slight *Vladimir Nabokov: The Structure of Literary Desire* (1982) is a long-on-theory, post-structuralist treatment of *Lolita*, *Ada*, and *Pale Fire*. David Rampton, in *Vladimir Nabokov: A Critical Study of the Novels* (1984), approaches the novels with some skepticism, examining the relationship of art to human life in terms other than those which he says Nabokov wants us to. *The Novels of Vladimir Nabokov* (1984) by Laurie Clancy is a brief general overview of fifteen of the Russian and English novels.

The finest example of critical commentary based on elucidation of intricate patterning in a number of Nabokov's novels will be found in D. Barton Johnson's *Worlds in Regression: Some Novels of Vladimir Nabokov* (1985). Pekka Tammi's *Problems of Nabokov's Poetics: A Narratological Analysis* (1985) studies in great detail the narrative manifestations of thematic dominants in Nabokov's writings. Stephen Jan Parker's *Understanding Vladimir Nabokov* (1987) is intended to serve as a guide or companion to Nabokov's writings for students as well as good nonacademic readers. In *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures* (1989), Leona Toker examines the tension between technique and content in ten of the novels. Vladimir Alexandrov proposes to dismantle the existing Nabokov critical canon in *Nabokov's Otherworld* (1991) by focusing on Nabokov's metaphysics and arguing that Nabokov's art is based on the writer's intuition of a transcendent realm. In *Nabokov's Early Fiction: Patterns of Self and Other* (1992), Julian Connolly treats the development of Nabokov's early Russian fiction through the perspective of the self and the other, which Connolly claims is a constant configuring structure of Nabokov's novels and stories.

Books Treating One Novel

Several of Nabokov's best novels have attracted book-length studies. Pride of place, naturally, belongs to *Lolita*. *The Annotated Lolita* (1970; revised 1991) by Alfred Appel, Jr. is the edition of the novel which should be used by all readers because of its keyed line-by-line annotations which offer essential information. The annotations which form Carl Proffer's *Keys to* Lolita (1968) should then serve as a companion volume to Appel's. In *An English-Russian Dictionary of Nabokov's* Lolita (1982), Alexander Nakhimovsky and Slava Paperno offer a glossary of Nabokov's transposition of the English text of *Lolita* into Russian that sheds light on Nabokov's style and his art of

translation. *Vladimir Nabokov's* Lolita (1987) and *Major Literary Characters:* Lolita (1993), both edited by Harold Bloom, anthologize previously published articles and book chapters on the novel.

Nabokov's Garden: A Guide to Ada (1974) by Bobbie Ann Mason is a well-written analysis of the novel as an inversion of the story of Eden demonstrated primarily through examination of *Ada*'s nature imagery. Annapaola Cancogni's *The Mirage in the Mirror: Nabokov's* Ada *and Its French Pre-Texts* (1985) examines the novel's network of allusions to French literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *Nabokov's* Ada*: The Place of Consciousness* (1985) by Brian Boyd not only provides the finest comprehensive commentary yet written on the novel but also offers a most perceptive general overview of Nabokov's art.

Find What the Sailor Has Hidden: Vladimir Nabokov's Pale Fire (1988) is Priscilla Meyer's provocative and controversial reading of the novel as Vladimir Nabokov's attempt to make sense of the assassination of his father, V.D. Nabokov. In *Phantom of Fact: A Guide to Nabokov's* Pnin (1989), Gennady Barabtarlo provides annotations to the text and a guide to the novel's history, characters, chronology, structure, and themes.

Books on Special Topics

As implied by its title, Jessie Lokrantz's *The Underside of the Weave. Some Stylistic Devices Used by Vladimir Nabokov* (1973) is an elucidation of several devices (intrusive voice, puns, names, sound patterns, mirrors) employed in the fiction. Alfred Appel, Jr.'s, *Nabokov's Dark Cinema* (1974) is a deft and perceptive appreciation of Nabokov, focusing on his art in relation to the movies and popular culture. *Blue Evenings in Berlin: Nabokov's Short Stories of the 1920s* (1978) contains Marina Naumann's close readings of nineteen of Nabokov's earliest Russian stories (1924–29). In *Nabokov Translated* (1977) Jane Grayson examines Nabokov's Russian-English bilingualism through comparisons of the original novels and autobiograpy and Nabokov's translations of them. Alan Levy's *Vladimir Nabokov: The Velvet Butterfly* (1984) is an odd conglomeration of biographical portrait and chronology, select bibliography, quotations from Nabokov's texts, and a personal appreciation of the writer. *Nabokov's Lepidoptera: Genres and Genera* (1985) by Julia Karges surveys Nabokov's work as a lepidopterist and examines the various butterflies found in his fiction. In *Freud and Nabokov* (1988), Geoffrey Green tackles the thorny topic of Nabokov's aversion to Freud.

Anthologies and Special Journal Issues

Nabokov: The Man and His Work (1967), edited by L.S. Dembo, provides a collection of critical essays, an oft-quoted interview of Nabokov by Appel,

and a critical checklist. *Nabokov: Criticism, Reminiscences, Translations, and Tributes* (1970), edited by Alfred Appel, Jr., and Charles Newman, holds important materials dedicated to Nabokov on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, including translations of articles by the Russian émigré writers, P.M. Bitsilli and Vladislav Khodasevich, reminiscences of Nabokov in the 1930s and at Cornell, and tributes from a host of admirers. An eclectic collection of essays, annotations, calendars, and other things is found in Carl Proffer's *A Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov* (1974).

Vladimir Nabokov: A Tribute (1979), edited by Peter Quennell, contains previously unpublished essays, articles, reminiscences, and interviews, including Dmitri Nabokov's notable tribute to his father. *Modern Fiction Studies: Nabokov Issue* (1979), edited by Charles Ross, is a collection of seven previously unpublished articles, notes and reviews, and a helpful checklist of Nabokov criticism. *Nabokov: The Critical Heritage* (1982), edited by Norman Page, is an anthology of selected book reviews of Nabokov's writings, in whole or part, which were published in the English-speaking world, 1934–77. J.E. Rivers and Charles Nicols' *Nabokov's Fifth Arc* (1982) offers previously unpublished essays, articles, and notes, the first publication in English of the postscript to the Russian edition of *Lolita*, and the first American publication of the author's notes to *Ada*. *Delta: Nabokov Issue* (1983), edited by Maurice Couturier, contains previously unpublished articles on a variety of topics; five in English and four in French.

George Gibian and Stephen Jan Parker's *The Achievements of Vladimir Nabokov* (1984) is an anthology of recollections, essays, criticism, and interviews from the Nabokov Commemorative Festival held at Cornell University in 1983. *Critical Essays on Vladimir Nabokov* (1984), edited by Phyllis Roth, provides a collection of previously published and unpublished essays which treat the full range of Nabokov's writings, translations of important Russian criticism by Mikhail Osorgin, Iuly Aikhenval'd, and Vladimir Weidle, and a selected annotated bibliography of Nabokov criticism.

Canadian-American Slavic Studies: Nabokov Issue (1985), edited by D. Barton Johnson, offers ten previously unpublished articles on Nabokov's writings by non-American critics. Bloom's *Modern Critical Views: Vladimir Nabokov* (1987) anthologizes fifteen previously published articles covering the full range of Nabokov's fiction. *Russian Literature Triquarterly: Nabokov Issue* (1991), edited by D. Barton Johnson, contains the Russian text of *The Enchanter*, an interview with Nabokov on the short story, articles on the prose, and a section of articles on Nabokov's poetry. *A Small Alpine Form: Studies in Nabokov's Short Fiction* (1993), edited by Charles Nicol and Gennady Barabtarlo, is a collection of sixteen previously unpublished essays on Nabokov's short stories. A semi-annual journal devoted to Nabokov studies, *The Nabokovian*, has published notes, abstracts, annotations, annual and special bibliographies, interviews, and photographic documents since its inception in 1978.

Books in Other Languages

Among the volumes devoted to Nabokov in other languages one finds: in French—*L'Arc: Nabokov* (1964), the first special journal issue in any language devoted entirely to Nabokov, and Maurice Couturier's *Nabokov* (1979); in German—Maria-Regina Kecht's *Das Groteske im Prosawerk von Vladimir Nabokov* (1983) and Christopher Hüllen's *Der Tod im Werk Vladimir Nabokovs* Terra Icognita (1990); in Russian—Zinaida Shakhovskaia's *V poiskakh Nabokova* (1979), Sergej Davydov's *"Teksty-Matreshki" Vladimira Nabokova* (1982), and Nikolai Anastas'ev's *Fenomen Nabokova* (1992), the first book-length study of Nabokov published in Russia; in Serbo-Croatian—Magdalena Medaric's *Od Mashenjke do Lolite* (1989).

Dissertations and Comparative Studies

There have been numerous Ph.D. dissertations, written primarily but not exclusively in English. Most of these are cited in the annual bibliographies in *The Nabokovian,* as are the several published volumes devoted in part to Nabokov, with such titles as *The Literature of Exhaustion: Borges, Nabokov, and Barth* by John Stark (1974), *Representation and the Imagination: Beckett, Kafka, Nabokov, and Schoenberg* by Daniel Albright (1981), *Transcending Exile: Conrad, Nabokov, I.B. Singer* by Asher Milbauer (1985), and *Reflections of Fantasy: The Mirror Worlds of Carroll, Nabokov, and Pynchon* by Beverly Lyon Clark (1986).

Bibliographies

The standard bibliography of Nabokov's writings is Michael Juliar's *Vladimir Nabokov: A Descriptive Bibliography* (1986), which includes the index, "Critical, Biographical, and Bibliographical Works Entirely or in Large Part About Nabokov." Among other useful bibliographies are: Jackson R. Bryer and Thomas J. Bergin, Jr., "Vladimir Nabokov's Critical Reputation in English: A Note and a Checklist" (1967);[9] Samuel Schuman, *Vladimir Nabokov: A Reference Guide* (1979), an annotated listing of Nabokov criticism in English, 1931–77; Ludmilla Foster, "Nabokov in Russian Émigré Criticism" (1972);[10] fall issues of *The Nabokovian,* which since 1980 have published an annual bibliography for the previous year of writings by and about Nabokov in all languages.

Stephen Jan Parker

Notes

1. Boyd, 1990, p. 117.

2. Interview with Vladimir Nabokov by Mati Laanso for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1973; transcript in *The Vladimir Nabokov Research Newsletter,* 10 (Spring 1983), p. 46.
3. For a well-balanced view of Nabokov's Russian émigré reception, see Struve, *Russkaia literatura v izgnanii.*
4. Appel and Newman, pp. 7–16.
5. Khodasevich, *Literaturnye stat'i i vospominaniia*; partial English translation in Appel and Newman, pp. 96–101.
6. Vladimir Weidle, review of *Despair* in *Krug*, no. 1, 1936; partial English translation in Field, 1971, pp. 238–240.
7. Berberova, *The Italics Are Mine*, p. 319.
8. Dembo, p. 228.
9. Ibid., pp. 225–274.
10. Proffer, 1974, pp. 42–53.

THE DEFENSE

On the surface, *The Defense* (*Zashchita Luzhina*, 1930) is the story of Grandmaster Luzhin, a Russian émigré chess genius who confuses his game with his life, goes mad, and commits suicide. In fact, however, the novel is Nabokov's paradoxical celebration of the incommensurability of matter and spirit—one of the thematic dominants of all his art—and of the literally transcendent nature of the art of chess.

This is not the way the novel has usually been read. It was the first of Nabokov's novels to be widely noticed by Russian émigré critics in Europe, many of whom saw it as marking his full maturation as a writer. But while many acknowledged its stylistic brilliance, they found it to be "un-Russian" in its formal characteristics and apparent lack of concern with the social, political, moral, or religio-philosophical themes that characterized prominent nineteenth-century works of Russian literature. And although they acknowledged the relative humanity of Luzhin in comparison to characters in Nabokov's earlier works, they still faulted Nabokov for being a cold writer who invented personages who were spiritually stunted.[1] Perhaps the most influential early reading of the novel was by the major poet Vladislav Khodasevich (see the article "Nabokov and Khodasevich" in this volume) who generalized that the central subject of Nabokov's art was art itself—the life of artist figures, often operating under masks such as Luzhin's chess, and a self-conscious display of the techniques of fiction.[2] When the novel was translated into English in 1964 following the success of *Lolita*, reviewers in the United States and Britain were rarely completely satisfied with it; even when struck by the brilliance of its style and devices, they faulted its supposed cruelty as well as the seeming tension between its focus on a character's life and the elaborate chess apparatus that fills

the novel.[3] Later critical responses tend to cluster around attempts to decipher the chess imagery in the novel or constitute variants of Khodasevich's metaliterary reading, such as the view that *The Defense* is one in a series of works by Nabokov about the failure of a near-genius, that it is about the artistic imagination and its workings, or that it dramatizes a form of authorial freedom that remains inaccessible to his characters.[4] Notwithstanding their widely differing interpretations, many of the critical studies published during the past three decades have shed much light on the novel's hidden patterns and associations of meaning. But only in recent years has the novel's metaphysical dimension been explored in detail and placed at the center of its and Nabokov's concerns.[5]

Nabokov's view of chess as a form of high art rather than as an enormously complicated but ultimately frivolous game is well documented. In his autobiography he explains that "inspiration of a quasi-musical, quasi-poetical, or to be quite exact, poetico-mathematical type, attends the process of thinking up a chess composition" (*SM* 288). And in an interview he acknowledged that although he had "no ear for music," he found "a queer substitute for music in chess—more exactly, in the composing of chess problems" (*SO* 35; see the article "Chess and Chess Problems" in this volume).[6]

Indeed, a similar link between chess and music constitutes a major theme in *The Defense*, and is one of the main paths leading to the novel's hidden meaning. Nabokov introduces the connection for the first time in his often-deceptive Foreword to the novel, in which he mentions an American publisher who wanted chess to be replaced by music and Luzhin to be "a demented violinist" (8). The reason this is probably an instance of Nabokov's pulling the reader's leg—and planting a hint about the novel at the same time—is that a linked motif of chess and music in fact appears throughout the text. Luzhin's father dreams that his son is a *Wunderkind* playing a piano (25; see also 78); a violinist who had just performed compositions by Luzhin's grandfather comments that chess "combinations [are] like melodies" (43); and Luzhin looks for chess games in old magazines in his grandfather's study under the gaze of a statue of a boy with a violin (54). Similarly, the Luzhin family's country doctor remarks that the great chess player Philidor was also "an accomplished musician" (68; see also 72, 85, 196). The omniscient narrator reinforces these associations between chess and a recognized form of high art (224) and crowns them with the musical description of the great match between Luzhin and Turati, his most important opponent (137–38).

A second insistent leitmotif in the novel that broadens the thematic resonance of chess is its link with love in both its sensual and Platonic forms. In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov creates a comparable association when he places his love for his wife, child, and other members of his family on a level with the three pursuits he valued most in life—artistic creation, lepidoptery, and chess. The effect of the association of chess and love in *The Defense*, when added to that of chess and music, is that the board on which Luzhin plays emerges as

a surprisingly variegated world (or as a model for the world at large) rather than a confined arena for a seemingly sterile pastime.[7]

A slight but definite erotic association marks little Luzhin's introduction to chess by the violinist who briefly describes the marvels of the game to him after concluding a flirtatious telephone conversation with an unidentified woman (42). The boy is actually shown how to play the game for the first time by his "aunt" who is having an affair with his father. In Nabokov's world it is also no mere chance that this crucial lesson takes place when the aunt has to seek refuge from a family storm that she has precipitated in the very same study in which the violinist had spoken to Luzhin about chess on the previous evening. The boy begins to develop his abilities at his aunt's apartment by playing with another of her admirers (55). Luzhin's father becomes aware of his son's great gift—which leads to the boy's being able to show it openly—after returning home from an illicit tryst with the aunt (65). The aunt surfaces again in Luzhin's life when she joins him and his father at a German spa, where the father had in fact hoped to retard his son's growing immersion in chess (74).

The association of chess and eros up to this point in the novel is based only on what might be termed fatidic contiguity: every important step in Luzhin's development as a child prodigy is marked by the aunt's influence or presence nearby. The motif of chess and eros continues to develop and becomes more intimately or directly attached to Luzhin, with the appearance of Valentinov, Luzhin's chess trainer and agent, who believes, in an unwitting parody of Freud's notion of "sublimation," that Luzhin's chess prowess is linked to the development of his sexual urge (94). Valentinov's philistine linking of eros and chess also reappears in the form of his attempt to involve Luzhin in a tawdry film about a protagonist who sexually assaults a young woman, only to eventually become a great chess player (247–48).

An entirely new tone is struck in the novel when Luzhin meets the young Russian émigrée who eventually marries him and has a direct effect on his chess and life. Indeed, the subject of their love leads directly to the theme of the irreconcilability of the flesh and the spirit that lies at the center of the novel. When Luzhin first notices her, the narrator implies that this event is somehow predestined (98–99). Luzhin's moment of recognition is in fact similar to those found in the writings of metaphysically inclined Romantics and Symbolists and can ultimately be traced to the Platonic conception of the primal union of male and female souls in an ideal realm. The young woman hears in Luzhin's clumsy speech "mysterious intonation hinting at some other kind of words." The narrator confirms this impression by noting that "Luzhin harbored within him a barely perceptible vibration, the shadow of sounds that he had once heard" (168). In addition to hinting at an otherworldly source for the sounds, this comment also recalls the Romantic idea of the inexpressibility of profound spiritual truth, which is another facet of the irreconcilability of the worlds of flesh and spirit. At the same time, the young woman is openly associated with

Luzhin's somnolent eros (99), even though the basis of their love is fundamentally chaste (183).

Despite the change in the tenor of the love now directly associated with Luzhin, the connection between love and chess persists. Luzhin begins "his own peculiar declaration of love" to the young woman "with a series of quiet moves" (99, 124). Moreover, Luzhin's falling in love leads to a turning point in his career. During the tournament for the championship of the world that follows, Luzhin suddenly transcends all his previous limitations and plays games that "had been even then termed immortal" (134). The young woman emerges as something like Luzhin's muse, although, ironically, she will reappear later as an abettor of his destruction as well.

It is important to note that it is precisely non-physical love that seems to be associated with Luzhin's brilliant play during this crucial tournament. He is troubled by the young woman's presence at his games and by the "smelly human warmth" of the other spectators whenever he does not "retreat too deeply into the abysses of chess" (122). Indeed, Luzhin has to ask the young woman to stop coming to his matches (125), which suggests that even Platonic earthly love is incommensurable with chess.

Luzhin emerges from the first pages of *The Defense* not so much as a little boy with a difficult personality, but as a vessel waiting to be filled with some as yet unspecified content. Before he encounters chess he already has a predilection for various pastimes that anticipate the game: he enjoys long division (17), is entertained by a collection of problems and puzzles (36), and memorizes cab numbers (50). The young aunt surfaces with a fateful role in this phase of Luzhin's existence as well. She gives him *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, and *Around the World in Eighty Days,* two books with which he falls "in love for his whole life," and which clearly prefigure his passion for chess because what attracts him is the "exact and relentlessly unfolding pattern" each describes (33–34).

Considered individually, the events that constitute the history of Luzhin's involvement with chess appear to be chance occurrences. But when examined retrospectively they emerge as links in a chain attaching him irrevocably to the game. The understanding of Luzhin's predicament that the reader achieves (which parallels Luzhin's own attempts to decipher the patterns in his life) resembles the retroactive examination of the past that Nabokov pursued throughout *Speak, Memory*. And as in Nabokov's case, concatenations of seemingly chance events in Luzhin's life suggest that an otherworldly fate operates in it. The tension between Luzhin's life and art thus ultimately appears to derive from an otherworldly force that controls his existence.

When Luzhin wakes up on the morning after he hears the violinist describe the splendors of chess, he is filled with an "incomprehensible excitement" (43). And when he is in the study with his aunt, he refuses to play anything but chess even though he has heard of the game only once before (45).

Immediately after being shown how the pieces move, he recognizes, with a striking precocity that implies some mysterious form of prior knowledge, that "the Queen is the most mobile."[8] Seeming chance then provides Luzhin with a free period in school and the opportunity to witness two classmates play the game. Moreover, he watches them with the paradoxical feeling that "in some way or other he understood the game better than these two, although he was completely ignorant of how it should be conducted" (49). Following this tantalizing experience, Luzhin begins to miss school in order to play with his aunt, but she proves to be inept at the game. Then fate intervenes again, this time to provide him with precisely the partner he needs—the aunt's admirer, an old man who "played divinely" (55). Luzhin achieves his first draw against this opponent, and the narrator signals the significance of this step in the boy's life by using imagery pertaining to vision in order to describe his sensations: "Luzhin perceived something . . . something cleared up, and the mental myopia that had been painfully beclouding his chess vision disappeared" (56).

This description is especially noteworthy because it has a direct bearing on the central issue of Luzhin's blindness with regard to the physical world around him. Given the value Nabokov placed on visual acuity, Luzhin's egregious inattention to the precise details of what surrounds him would seem at the very least to tarnish him in his creator's eyes. But by describing Luzhin's sudden insight into the world of chess in terms of the sense of sight, Nabokov implicitly validates chess as a supremely noble pursuit, which the associations of chess with music and with love also suggest. This is not to say that in *The Defense* Nabokov changes his mind about the values and rewards of perception directed at the external world.[9] The narrator's description of the fiancée's long-range sympathies, and his richly detailed (and typically Nabokovian) rendering of settings and characters in the world of the novel constitute a striking contrast with Luzhin's myopia. But rather than emerging as an irresolvable tension in the work, this contrast suggests the multiplicity of valid pursuits in Nabokov's world. As *Speak, Memory* demonstrates, art, chess, love, and butterflies are at the top of Nabokov's hierarchy of values. Thus butterflies alone are missing from the halo of associations surrounding Luzhin's chess. (Similarly, a monomaniacal fixation on butterflies to the exclusion of everything else in life characterizes the eponymous protagonist in Nabokov's short story "Pil'gram" [1930; translated as "The Aurelian"], and his passion is clearly sanctioned by the story's omniscient narrator.)

Fatidic coincidences conspire to keep Luzhin attached to the world of chess even when other individuals do their best to prevent it. Luzhin's wife tries to keep him from thinking about the game after his nervous collapse. But a former acquaintance of hers arrives precisely, as the narrator stresses, at the time when Luzhin is again starting to sink into the world of chess with the result that the wife's vigilance is frustrated (209; 215). The game's hold on Luzhin is consolidated by his finally discovering the pocket chess set that had been lost in the lining of his jacket for several months (218) and by the various

small chores and delays that prevent his going on a trip abroad that his wife plans in order to entertain and distract him (234).

Because chess in *The Defense* abuts the otherworld, much of the novel's imagery dramatizes a dualistic conception of existence. We find repeated oppositions between spirit and matter as well as their analogues—chess life versus mundane life, madness versus normalcy, reality versus unreality, waking versus sleep. From the time he discovers the game, chess for Luzhin is infinitely more attractive and compelling than the world of physical existence. But it is only after he begins his intensive play in the tournament with Turati that the chess world he enters actually becomes more real than the so-called "real" world. This transvaluation persists between games as well. The first question he asks his fiancée when she comes to visit him in his hotel room is "are you real?" (130). After he wakes up from the nap into which he drifts following her visit, he remembers her as "a delightful dream he had dreamed" (132). Thus only "chess life" is "real life" for Luzhin (134).

Another aspect of Luzhin's dualistic existence is that after he adjourns his game with Turati the division of the novel's world between spirit and matter also becomes the difference between good and evil. The long description of Luzhin's laborious and confused progress out of the hall where he had played resembles nothing so much as a nightmarish journey through hell. Phantoms, shades, ghosts, and shadows are mentioned some dozen times in two pages; darkness, blackness, smoke, murk, and fog obscure his sight (140–41). The entire ominous realm through which Luzhin passes after the game recalls the Gnostic view of the world of matter as fallen: it resembles a prison, a dream, or a world of the dead, it deadens the senses, and it is dark in contrast to the transcendent, light-filled world of spirit.[10]

The question of good and evil reappears later in the novel as well, but in an entirely different, and surprising context. After Luzhin returns to everyday consciousness following his collapse, his fiancée decides to take care of him. On the one hand, she does everything she can to keep his mind off chess and to distract him with what could be called "normal" but frivolous hobbies. On the other, she takes it upon herself to make his life increasingly physical (something in which he had never been interested [95]). She begins by taking him to a tailor, but, as the narrator puts it, "the renovation of Luzhin's *envelope* did not stop here" (170; italics added). He is also found a new room in her parents' building; and then the reader is given an unexpectedly long and detailed description of the apartment, including the labyrinthine floorplan, in which Luzhin and his fiancée will live when married (172–74). Because this accretion of new matter around Luzhin is complemented by his fiancée's efforts to make him forget chess, the overall effect is that the spiritual side of his existence is muted and physically obscured. And since Luzhin's chess genius crowns the hierarchy of values that Nabokov embodies in *The Defense*, the young woman's loving attempts to arrange for Luzhin's physical well-

being emerge, ironically, as negative. (The irony is made even more poignant when we recall that her appearance in Luzhin's life seems correlated with the renaissance of his genius.) Gnostic beliefs also support this interpretation because garments and physical dwellings are widespread symbols for the matter entrapping the divine soul of the individual who is mired in the fallen physical world.[11]

Even without being aware of Gnostic symbolism, one could not but conclude that Luzhin's young woman, no matter how well intentioned and attractive because of her sensitivity and kindliness, has a deleterious effect on him. Despite his vague anticipation of the pleasures of married life, prior to the wedding Luzhin also experiences moments of "strange emptiness" (177). Afterwards, his wife tries to prevent him from playing chess and indulges his lethargy and somnolence: he gains weight steadily, thereby literally augmenting his body at the expense of his spirit (233). When he oversleeps, she comments approvingly, but without realizing the irony in her words, "that way you could sleep your whole life away" (236). And finally, in a phrase that is especially touching and, in the context of the novel's Gnostic theme, horrible at the same time, she encourages him to "stay in bed a while longer, it's good for you, you're fat" (239). Thus although Luzhin's fiancée admires his genius but does not understand it, she is caught in the extremely poignant dilemma of having to deny the most important side of her husband's being and of not being able to choose his chess over his life, all after inadvertently inspiring him to new heights in the game.

Other suggestions that metaphysical evil may be a part of Luzhin's life are concealed in a series of small details associated with the apartment Luzhin comes to share with his wife. In describing the dining room, the narrator casually mentions that "above the table a lone, fluffy, little toy devil was hanging from the low lamp" (173). No explanation of this bizarre object or entity is given; neither Luzhin nor his fiancée appears to notice it. Later, however, on the wedding night, "a fluffy imp hanging from the lamp immediately came down like a spider" onto the dining room table (181). Once again, this odd incident passes without any comment from the narrator or notice by the characters. The reader, however, cannot help but register the repetition and conclude that it is significant. A few lines down this impression is augmented by the description of the bizarre, trance-like state that Luzhin's wife assumes in the bedroom: "she smiled and for a long time watched a big, sluggish fly that circled around the Mauretanian lamp, buzzing hopelessly, and then disappeared" (181). The prolonged circling of the fly and its association with the wife's drowsiness suggest a dulling repetitiveness that impedes spiritual effort and achievement. This is in fact an accurate foreshadowing of the pall that falls over Luzhin's life in that apartment. Thus the place that is a synecdoche for Luzhin's marriage and earthly existence, and which should have implied a haven and personal fulfillment, emerges instead as a trap.

Nabokov reinforces the impression that through his marriage Luzhin is condemned to a sort of hell by adding a casual reference to a literary work containing a famous depiction of its torments: a bookcase in the apartment's study is "crowned with a broad-shouldered, sharp-faced Dante in a bathing cap" (173). The humorous reference to the close-fitting headgear the poet is usually depicted as wearing may be an instance of the author's attempt to mislead the reader into not taking the allusion seriously. But even if the reader should miss this reference, it is repeated later when Luzhin refers to "the author of a certain divine comedy" and points to "the bust of Dante" (216). In this context, Luzhin's escape from the apartment by means of suicide seems less the act of a madman than an attempt to transcend an evil realm by releasing the soul from the fetters of the body.

The fact that Luzhin's wife attempts but fails to make him forget chess establishes a connection between the game and the apartment, which is the primary locus of her efforts. But is there any suggestion that evil is associated with Luzhin's pursuit of the game itself? A significant detail implying that this is not the case, one which also illustrates the remarkable cohesion of the novel down to an "atomic" level, is the resemblance between the narrator's description of Dante's bust and of Turati at the tournament. The Italian grandmaster is also "broad-shouldered," and although he is of course not wearing a "bathing cap," he has a haircut that looks very similar (124–25). The difference between this allusion to Dante and the overt references to him and his epic poem in connection with Luzhin's apartment is that now a brilliant practitioner of chess is implicitly crowned with a resemblance to a literary genius. One can infer, therefore, that Nabokov wanted to place his invented Italian grandmaster's chess genius on a level with Dante's, and since Luzhin seems to be at least a match for Turati (154), we return to the conclusion that he is in the same exalted company of artists.

Although there is no suggestion that Luzhin's mania for chess is itself tainted by error or evil, the game appears both frightening and alluring to him when he has to adjourn his match with Turati (139). Why would there be two sides to Luzhin's reaction to chess? The answer may lie in the entirely different ways that his physical and spiritual sides are nurtured, and it is hardly an oversimplification to say that what is good for one is bad for the other. Because chess in its essence transcends the material world, in Luzhin we have the situation of a human being, possessing both a body and a soul, confronting a purely spiritual realm. This incongruity lies at the heart of the novel's problematics. The bliss and harmony of chess can be seen as a reflection of the transcendent nature of the game. But the horror is due to Luzhin's corporeality, to the incommensurability of his body and spirit. He glimpses the terrifying depths of chess during a moment of pain caused by the match that burns down to his fingers and interrupts his meditation on the game—that is, when his body asserts itself and he looks at the board from the point of view of a physical being. Luzhin never really returns to a "normal" earthly existence

after the game is adjourned. His seeing the material world around him as spectral implies that he is still in the higher chess world, into which he had "crossed" during the game. The whole character of his life on the eve of his wedding and following it also suggests that some major part of his psyche is absorbed elsewhere.

What strikes many readers as clear evidence of Luzhin's being simply insane is that as the novel progresses he sees his life increasingly in chess terms—as a frightful "combination" that he thinks is developing against him. Luzhin's situation seems so alien and implausible that many readers have been tempted to dismiss it as an obvious example of Nabokov's perverse fondness for playing with the destinies of eccentric characters. However, Luzhin's preoccupation with evidence that his everyday existence is part of some vast game or conspiracy is at most only an artistic exaggeration of Nabokov's own perfectly sane and serious search for patterns in his own life. As he argues in *Speak, Memory*, the point of autobiography should be "the following of . . . thematic designs through one's life" (27), a practice, which, as he demonstrates, reveals patterning that implies the workings of fate. In fact, Nabokov himself uses chess imagery in the autobiography when describing how his father was spared the necessity of fighting a duel—an event that, in his view, foreshadows his father's murder years later (193).[12]

Luzhin's beginning to see mundane phenomena in terms of chess is also not simply a madman's paranoia and needs to be understood in the light of the laws that underlie this particular novel's fictional world. Because chess appears to transcend the physical realm in *The Defense*, it is appropriate for a player with vatic gifts to see the things of this world in terms of the true, higher reality that holds sway over matter (even if this makes him appear to be mad in mundane terms).

Finally, if one wants to make sense of this novel's specific themes and structures, it is essential to realize that Luzhin's life is in fact filled with patterns and that they are not simply delusions he projects onto an indifferent world. In addition to the developing "combination" he notices, there are many repetitions of which he is unaware even though they bear on his life. Because these occur both before and after he becomes immersed in chess, the two parts of his physical existence emerge as linked, and chess is eliminated as the sole cause of his "madness" and suicide. For example, his fear toward the end of his life that a plot was developing against him is foreshadowed as early as the first page of the novel in the plot that his parents hatch: they plan to tell him that they have decided to send him to school and in preparation move "around him in apprehensively narrowing circles" all summer long (15). The move to the city that will enable Luzhin to attend school will of course also initiate the fatidic sequence of events leading to his discovery of chess. In like manner, the threat Luzhin fears at the end of his life is a series of reminders of his past chess prowess, which, if he submits to it, will lead to his sinking again into the

horrifying but compelling abysses of the game. Another example of a childhood experience that is repeated in later life could be called Luzhin's "running away motif" (21, 70, 141). Even Luzhin's climbing into the country house through a window after running away at the station (22–23) is recapitulated in a different key when he commits suicide through "defenestration," as Nabokov once called it (255). In all cases, Luzhin is escaping pursuers and returning to what he believes is his only safe haven.

Because of the tightness of Nabokov's fictional weave it is hardly possible to stop tracing a particular thematic strand at any given point. One leads to another, reaching forward and backward through the text, with the result that a tug in one place moves the whole fabric of the work. A final instance of patterning related to Luzhin's childhood escape is worth mentioning, however, because of its significance for interpreting the novel's conclusion. When Luzhin returns to consciousness in the sanatorium, he is struck at first by the physical resemblance between the psychiatrist who is treating him and the peasant who had been recruited by his parents to bring him bodily down from the attic in the country house to which he had fled from the train station (160). Understandably, this peasant became the "future inhabitant of [Luzhin's] future nightmares" (24). In addition to the "coincidence" that the two men look alike, the repetition in this case lies in the fact that the psychiatrist can also be understood as having brought Luzhin back from an escape into another realm (the narrator describes Luzhin as coming back "from a long journey" [160]). And if this parallel holds, then the "real" world to which Luzhin returns following his collapse is also like a nightmare because it is the habitation of the peasant's physical analogue—the psychiatrist. This conclusion is in keeping with the view of the "real," material world as fallen that emerges from a consideration of the Gnostic and other, related dualities in the novel. An additional conclusion is that the world to which Luzhin had escaped during his chess-induced collapse is the antithesis of a nightmare—or is, in other words, the *true* waking state. And since this other world seems to be something like a transcendent dimension into which Luzhin had crossed, one can infer that according to the novel's logic the otherworld is preferable to this world. In this light, Luzhin's suicide is a return to a realm to which he had journeyed temporarily during his unconsciousness.

The most interesting patterns are those that Luzhin does not notice at all and that are left by Nabokov for the reader to discover. These are very numerous, and because they were obviously concealed in the text with great skill and subtlety, it is clear that the device carries considerable weight in terms of the work's overall meaning. For example, no explanation is given of the reason why at one point Luzhin sits looking at a "black match tip, writhing in pain after having just gone out in his fingers" (233). His wife is puzzled and upset by his seeming lethargy, and the narrator is silent about the reasons for Luzhin's behavior. It is therefore up to the reader to infer that Luzhin was lost in recollections of his game with Turati, which was adjourned moments after

a match he had forgotten to raise to a cigarette burned down to his hand (139). In short, he was contemplating another sign of the combination that is developing against him and threatening to reimmerse him in the abysses of chess he both fears and loves.

A much subtler form of patterning, which would probably have seemed very sinister to Luzhin had he been able to grasp it, is also left concealed by Nabokov. It turns out that the young woman Luzhin will marry in Berlin had known at least one of his classmates in St. Petersburg—a "shy and retiring" boy who subsequently lost an arm in the Civil War (90, 31). But such links between Luzhin and his fiancée, which predate their meeting by some two decades, do not stop there. It also emerges that although they went to different schools, the two probably had the same geography teacher. The narrator states that the young woman's teacher also taught at a boys' school. She recalls the man as suffering from tuberculosis, being surrounded by a romantic aura, and having an impulsive manner of noisily running into his classroom (88–89). The last detail grows in significance when Luzhin has his highly unpleasant encounter with his old classmate at the émigré ball, because the latter recalls how their "geographer" would "fly like a hurricane into the classroom" (198, 48). The role of the geography teacher is clearly fateful, for it is his unexpected absence due to a cold that leads to a free hour in school and Luzhin's witnessing the beginning of a game between two boys (47–48). The morning after, Luzhin makes his "unprecedented decision" to skip school and visit his aunt in order to learn to play the game. On the way to her apartment, another multi-leveled coincidence occurs. Luzhin runs into the geography teacher, "who . . . was rushing in the direction of the school, blowing his nose" (the reference to what may be a chronic cold of course recalls the schoolgirl's perhaps romanticized notion of the teacher's consumption). To avoid being seen by him, Luzhin turns abruptly and feigns looking into a hairdresser's window, which causes the chess set in his satchel to rattle (50). Thus the teacher is again associated with chess, as well as with the young woman who will become Luzhin's wife, and therefore with his entire later life. But even this does not exhaust the coincidences. When facing the display window, Luzhin sees "the frizzled heads of three waxen ladies with pink nostrils . . . staring directly at him." This scene returns years later at a moment in Luzhin's life when he is especially vulnerable to fatidic patterning. He has recently concluded that everything he does, and everything that happens to him, is part of a mysterious opponent's design because it is all tinged with a sense of déjà-vu. The tactic with which he hopes to counter this is an unmotivated act that he hopes will confuse "the sequence of moves planned by his opponent" (242). While out shopping with his wife and mother-in-law, Luzhin suddenly feigns having to see a dentist, and after a short taxi ride sets off for home. To his dismay, he recognizes that he had done even all this before (during his repeated attempts to "escape"), and goes into the first store he sees, "deciding to outsmart his opponent with a new surprise." The store turns out to be a lady's hairdresser, and, in what Luzhin

thinks is "an unexpected move, a magnificent move," he offers to buy a wax bust. But as he realizes, without saying exactly where and how he had seen it already (which the reader can do), "the wax lady's look, her pink nostrils—this also had happened before." The crowning event in this sequence, which recapitulates childhood incidents that led to Luzhin's immersion in chess, is that shortly after leaving the hairdresser's he is hailed by Valentinov and falls into his clutches (243–44). The similarity between this character's surname and the geography teacher's first name ("Valentin" in the Russian original) makes it seem as if Luzhin was somehow "found out" years after he decided to skip school.

There is also patterning in the novel that consists of details anticipating Luzhin's end, such as the still from a film showing a man hanging from a ledge (247).[13] The primary difference between them and other repetitions in Luzhin's life is that his own memory can illuminate the latter. But the details foreshadowing Luzhin's death are beyond his or any other character's ken, which is what has led some readers to take them as instances of Nabokov's intrusive presence in the text—an interpretation that is valid only so long as Nabokov is understood to be impersonating an otherworldly fate. For example, the drawings Luzhin makes after his marriage include a train on a bridge spanning a chasm and a skull on a telephone book (208). The first clearly implies a potential for catastrophe should the bridge collapse or the train fall as does the "memento mori" aspect of the second. The telephone book may serve as an adumbration of the important use to which Valentinov will put the telephone when attempting to reach Luzhin in order to inveigle him into taking part in a film, an action that contributes greatly to Luzhin's sense of entrapment later in the novel; the telephone is also linked with Luzhin's first hearing of chess from the violinist.

Luzhin's transfer of a chess mentality to his life—his desire to anticipate and forestall what will happen to him—is in effect an attempt to read his own future. This may be possible on a chess board, where extrapolations from a given position can anticipate future positions, but is it possible in life? As Nabokov insisted in interviews, he did not believe that a future of this sort exists (*SO* 184, 185). In *Speak, Memory* he makes it clear that evidence of fate's workings can be gleaned only from one's past life by means of memory. Nonetheless, it appears that Nabokov does allow Luzhin partial insight into his future, or into one possible future. This is suggested by Luzhin's reaction to Valentinov after he is snatched up by him and taken to the film studio with the obviously ironic name "Veritas." Multitudes of beautiful chess memories flash through Luzhin's mind, and the narrator lends his voice to Luzhin's recognition that "the key was found. The aim of the attack was plain. By an implacable repetition of moves it was leading once more to that same passion which would destroy the dream of life. Devastation, horror, madness" (246). This passage is rich in meanings. Luzhin finally understands that he is being inexorably drawn back into the world of chess. However, he cannot rise to the

perspective that would allow him to recognize that he has been fated to this from childhood. In terms of the dominant duality reigning over the novel, it is most revealing that, after an initial ecstatic recapitulation of a thousand games he had played in the past, Luzhin shifts to the destructive nature of this passion. This double attitude embraces both sides of his being—the spiritual and the physical. Luzhin's horror is the expression of the physical being's shrinking from the extinction of the self that is the price for total immersion in the world of chess. The reference to "the dream of life," a phrase betraying the presence of the implied author in this passage of free indirect discourse, recalls the Gnostic themes evoked earlier in the novel, and indicates that the quotidian physical existence Luzhin seems to cherish at this moment is a delusion and that real life is elsewhere. Similarly, the references to "love" in relation to Luzhin's past crown the complex series of associations between his development as a player and the themes of sensual and Platonic love. This is a level of meaning about the hidden springs in the world of the novel that also betrays the presence of an implied author.

Luzhin decides to commit suicide in order to escape from what the reader can see as his destiny from early childhood. But does his suicide indicate that Luzhin has in fact succeeded in asserting his free will and thwarting fate? Probably not. There is a possibility that his seemingly freely willed death is yet another, consummately ironic, manifestation of predestination. When Luzhin looks down from the window out of which he will let himself fall, the narrator states that "the whole chasm was seen to divide into dark and pale squares." This image is usually read as the final instance of Luzhin's deluded projection of chess-related images onto the world around him. But because there is much evidence in the novel implying that Nabokov transvalued earthly madness into otherworldly sense, it may also be argued that the chessboard pattern he briefly glimpses is in fact the image of the true eternity that awaits him. In other words, if through death Luzhin enters the same world he touched during the peak moments of his games, then even suicide does not allow him to escape from the chess that is his fate. It would obviously be a mistake to claim that the novel concludes with more than a hint that Luzhin may be entering another mode of existence (and it would clearly be absurd to read the novel as Nabokov's advocacy of suicide). But did not Nabokov once imply this possibility himself when he said: "As I approached the conclusion of the novel I suddenly realized that the book doesn't end"?[14]

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NOTES

1. Struve, 1984, 280–87.
2. Khodasevich, "On Sirin."
3. See the reviews collected in *Nabokov: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Norman Page, pp. 154–66.

4. See, for example, D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 83–92; Field, 1967, p. 175; Tammi, 1985, p. 136; Connolly, 1992, p. 96. Clancy, pp. 36–37, who is disturbed by Nabokov's supposed inability to identify "the true nature of the malady that possesses Luzhin," provides an especially shallow reading of the novel.
5. See my *Nabokov's Otherworld*, chapter 2, which is a fuller version of this article; and Boyd, 1990, chapter 14.
6. Tammi, 1985, 135, gives an excellent overview of other parallels that Nabokov drew between chess and music as well as between chess and literature. Tammi also argues convincingly against searching Nabokov's texts for "specific parallels between Nabokovian prose style and given properties of the game" and suggests instead an analogical relationship between chess moves and compositional devices (pp. 135–36).
7. See Boyd, 1990, pp. 333–36, for a reading of the novel as a tug of war between two otherwordly forces trying to lead Luzhin to chess versus domesticity.
8. There appears to be a curious slip in the novel at this point. Luzhin is described as unrolling "an oilcloth board" when he insists on playing chess with his aunt (45), but there is no indication where he got it from or that he even knew that playing chess requires a board. Or could this be another of Nabokov's tricky, surreptitious indications of Luzhin's prophetic precocity?
9. For the crucial role of perception in relation to Nabokov's aesthetics, ethics, and metaphysics, see my *Nabokov's Otherworld*, Index entries under "perceptiveness and perspicacity."
10. Jonas, pp. 57, 68, 73.
11. Jonas, pp. 55–56. For more on Nabokov's uses of Gnosticism, see Davydov, 1982, chapter 3, and my *Nabokov's Otherworld*, Index entries under "Gnosticism."
12. For more on this motif, see Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, p. 80.
13. Identified by Appel, 1974, pp. 161, 165. A good overview of recurrences and patterns in the novel is provided by Tammi, 1985, pp. 138–42.
14. Quoted by Field, *VN*, p. 132. Nabokov was also quite capable of treating the theme of "climbing" to transcendence in a humorous and parodic vein; see his poem "The Ballad of Longwood Glen" (1957) in *Poems and Problems*, 177–79, in which "Art Longwood" climbs a tree, is greeted by "delirious celestial crowds . . . in the snow of the clouds," and never returns to earth.

DESPAIR

Delusion, desperation, false doubles, and Dostoevsky emerge as prevalent themes in Nabokov's sixth Russian novel *Otchaianie* (*Despair*), composed in Berlin in 1932.[1] Nabokov himself translated it in 1936 into English, in what was his "first serious attempt . . . to use English for what may be loosely termed an artistic purpose" (*Des* xi). The book sold badly in England and soon a German bomb destroyed almost the entire stock. When a translation of *Despair* appeared in French in 1939, it was decimated by the young reviewer Jean-Paul Sartre who wrote: "It seems to me that this desperate eagerness to

attack and destroy himself is quite characteristic of the manner of Mr. Nabokov. This author has a great deal of talent, but it is of the old school. I am thinking of his spiritual mentors, particularly Dostoevsky; for the hero of this strange, abortive novel resembles, more than he does his double Felix, the characters of the *The Raw Youth*, *The Eternal Husband*, *Notes from the Underground*. . . . But Dostoevsky believed in his characters. Mr. Nabokov no longer believes in his, nor even in the art of the novel."[2]

Even a superficial glance at *Despair* reveals the extent of the misreading to which the reviewer subjected the novel. In his prose as well as in his numerous "strong opinions" Nabokov reiterated time and again his fundamental contempt for Dostoevsky, whom he ranked as "mediocre and overrated." The fame of Dostoevsky's "melodramatic muddle and phony mysticism" was beyond Nabokov's comprehension (*SO* 226).[3] In regard to Dostoevsky the usually capricious Nabokov was being neither facetious nor provocative. What from the Western perspective appears to be an outrageous statement, is from the Russian point of view a rather tame opinion, one that was shared by a number of writers, including Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Bunin, all of whom Nabokov admired. In his repeated sallies against Dostoevsky Nabokov spared only *The Double*. However, the fact that he considered it to be the best of Dostoevsky's works did not prevent Nabokov from parodying its doppelgänger (double) theme and Dostoevsky's mannerisms. Nabokov's hero, the murderer Hermann, makes repeated jabs at the "famous writer of Russian thrillers" (88) whom he nicknames "Dusty," and attributes to him such opuses as "Crime and Slime" and "Crime and Pun" (177, 201). *Despair*, according to Ellen Pifer, "burlesques the breathless, urgent immediacy of Dostoevsky's confessional narrative." She also links Hermann to the other deluded murderer, Raskolnikov of *Crime and Punishment*—or "Rascalnikov" in Hermann's coinage (189). In *Despair*, according to Pifer, Nabokov exposes the doppelgänger motif for what it really is, "a deceptive shadow-theme, tracing delusions of Hermann's mad mind."[4] For Nabokov the only real number is *one*. He considered the doppelgänger theme "a frightful bore," and claimed that there are no "real" doubles in his novels: "Felix in *Despair* is really a *false* double" (*SO* 83–84). Moreover, unlike Dostoevsky's novels, *Despair* with its thoroughly unrepentant hero "does not uplift the spiritual organ of man, nor does it show humanity the right exit" (*Des* xii).

Recently, J. Foster returned to the theme of parody and to Nabokov's polemic with Dostoevsky. Foster presents *Despair* as a "two-tiered mnemonic system," in which a character's recollections of a personal past (the murder) coexist with intertextual reminiscences from Dostoevsky (Raskolnikov's concoction of the superman theory). According to Foster, Hermann imagines that he succeeds where his predecessor fails, but he actually falls into a similar trap.[5]

Leaving aside the fruitful inter-textual interpretations of the novel, I propose to look at *Despair* from an infra-textual angle, for a polemic similar to the one with Dostoevsky takes place between the author and his hero

Hermann and their respective texts. From the early 1930s the technique of encapsulating one text within another becomes prevalent in Nabokov's fiction, and the interplay between the inner and outer text develops into one of the author's most intriguing games. *Despair* is an early variant of this *matreshka* technique. (A *matreshka* is a rather plump, carved wooden Russian doll that contains a number of other dolls, each a smaller replica of the original.) The novel *Despair* contains an unfinished tale authored by the hero, Hermann, as well as his diary, found in the final chapter. Hermann's tale about doubles constitutes the inner text of the novel, whereas Nabokov's novel can be seen as the outer text. However, the relationship between the inner and outer text becomes obscured by the fact that Hermann's manuscript and Nabokov's novel are identical texts. The authorship of the latter is clear only through an examination of the genre titles given to the respective texts. Thus Hermann calls his work either a "tale" or a "story" (3, 81, 157, 208), while Nabokov defines his text as a "novel" (80, 157; see also the title page of the book). This subtle though significant difference points to the existence of two strata of text, one belonging to the hero, the other to the author, even though the author per se does not take part directly in the novel. The first part of this essay deals with Hermann's tale, the second part is an attempt to bring out the cryptic line of Nabokov's hand in Hermann's manuscript and to characterize the adversarial relationship between the author, his hero, and their respective artistic creations.

Hermann's Tale of the Doubles

Despair is a novel that mocks the notion of doubles and doubleness in general. The novel's plot is simple: the chocolate merchant, Hermann, happens to discern his double in the tramp Felix. This discovery, or more properly, revelation, leads Hermann to the idea of the "perfect crime," and he devises an ingenious plan for the murder of his double: to substitute the victim for the murderer. Then, Hermann, having given himself a new identity, will continue to live on the insurance money received as a result of his own death. This "brilliantly" conceived plan is, however, destroyed by a fundamental flaw. The striking similarity of the doubles, so obvious to Hermann, passes unnoticed by anyone else, and the police all too quickly ascertain the victim's identity. After the world has condemned his crime, Hermann seeks recognition as an artist. In justification of his "crime of genius" he undertakes to write a detective tale about it—creating in this way an artistic variant of the crime, the murder's literary double.

From the very beginning, Hermann views his carefully planned murder as a distinctive type of artistic endeavor, as art itself. He compares "the breaker of the law which makes such a fuss about a little spilled blood, with a poet or stage performer" (3). Indeed, repeatedly comparing murder to art, Hermann reminds us more of a poet than of a murderer. Goethe himself once declared

that there was no crime of which he felt himself incapable. Thomas De Quincey, in his famous triptych entitled "On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts," calls the murderer an artist, and his crime his *oeuvre:* "As the inventor of murder, and the father of art, Cain must have been a man of first-rate genius."[6] Although a novice in the genre of Cain, Hermann intends his murder to be "perfect" in the artistic sense: "If the deed is planned and performed correctly then the force of creative art is such, that were the criminal to give himself up the very next morning, none would believe him, the invention of art containing far more intrinsical truth than life's reality" (122). De Quincey mentions also the technical difficulties connected with the flawless execution of such a work of art: "No artist can ever be sure of carrying through his own fine preconception. Awkward disturbances will arise; people will not submit to have their throats cut quietly; they will run, they will kick, they will bite; and, whilst the portrait-painter often has to complain of too much torpor in his subject, the artist in our line is generally embarrassed by too much animation."[7] Hermann successfully surmounts these difficulties by tricking Felix into cooperating in his own murder. Moreover, by killing Felix, the artist forces his model into complete immobility—a quality absolutely necessary for the completion of Hermann's next opus, his tale: "what is death, if not a face at peace—its artistic perfection? Life only marred my double" (15). Consistent with the principle of murder as art, Hermann bases his work on a dead model. Hence the world he creates is the tale's stagnant, inert cosmos.

In the murder itself, as well as in the later recounting of it, Hermann is guided by the same principle of mirror symmetry. The outside world hardly exists for Hermann. His gaze is directed inward, toward a solipsistic, Narcissus-like cosmos, in which the mirror becomes the highest aesthetic idol, and a mirror likeness is the guarantee of artistic success. The consequent mirror symmetry of the doubles (Felix is left-handed) dictates the structure of the story Hermann writes: "My accomplishment resembles a game of patience, arranged beforehand; first I put down the open cards in such a manner as to make its success a dead certainty; then I gathered them up in the opposite order and gave the prepared pack to others with the perfect assurance it would come out" (122).

According to Hermann's scheme, his tale should consist of ten chapters, with a happy ending followed by a traditional epilogue (178–80). Analogous to the pre-arranged game of solitaire, Hermann forces the composition of his tale about doubles to reflect its own theme. The story is composed of two parts that reflect each other. On the axis running between chapters 5 and 6, the coordinates of the symmetrically distributed motifs are brought together. A number of motifs in chapter 2 (the yellow post, the theft of the car, the shaving brush alias the pine cone, and so forth) are mirror reflections of their doubles from chapter 9. Chapters 2 and 9 fall with mirror-like precision on either side of the imaginary compositional axis:

1 (2) 3 4 5 | 6 7 8 (9) 10 [11] [8]

The yellow post on Ardalion's plot of land described in chapters 2 and 9, to which the tale and its events frequently return, serves as a landmark for the text's symmetric topography.

Hermann's obsession with mirrors also dictates the narrative tenses in the story. In Hermann's "double-time perspective," the future and the past reflect and contaminate each other. In chapter 2, for example, the narrator smuggles into his description of the summer landscape (June) snow that belongs to the future scene of the murder (March), described only in chapter 9. "Thus the future shimmers through the past" (37), explains Hermann. This bi-directionality of time becomes more pronounced upon a second reading, when the reader, this time along with Hermann, is seized by the same double perspective, the same déjà vu, and places all the motifs in their proper time sequence.

The three meetings of the doubles are also symmetrically timed:

1st		2nd		3rd
(May 9) June July Aug. Sept	(Oct. 1st)	Nov. Dec. Jan. Feb.		(March 9)

The time coordinates of the first and last meetings meet halfway on October's mirror surface, and autumn becomes the prism of the story's calendar. It is not by chance that the following picture of absolute mirror symmetry pertains to the same time of year: "A few days before the first of October I happened to walk with my wife through the Tiergarten; there on a foot bridge we stopped, with our elbows upon the railing. . . . When a slow leaf fell, there would flutter up to meet it, out of the water's shadowy depths, its unavoidable double. Their meeting was soundless. The leaf came twirling down, and twirling up there would rise towards it, eagerly, its exact, beautiful, lethal reflection. I could not tear my gaze away from those inevitable meetings. 'Come on,' said Lydia and sighed. 'Autumn, autumn,' she said after a while, 'Autumn. Yes, it is autumn.' . . . I lagged behind and pierced fallen leaves with my *cane*" (62; italics added). In this scene Hermann exposes the very essence of his tale's symmetrical composition, while behind Hermann's back Nabokov gives away the fatal clue.[9] Not unlike the autumn leaves, the pages of Hermann's tale meet their own reflected images. (In Russian the word "list" is a homonym, signifying both "leaf" and "sheet".) Their soundless and unavoidable meeting takes place on the mirror surface that divides chapters 5 and 6.

Hermann, pulling the strings of his tale, reminds us of the "crimson spider amid a black web" found on the cover of a "rotten detective novel" that he gives one day to Lydia. "She dipped into it and found it terribly thrilling—felt that she simply could not help taking a peep at the end, but as that would spoil everything, she shut her eyes tight and tore the book in two down its back and hid the second, concluding, portion; then, later, she forgot the place and was

a long, long time searching the house for the criminal she herself had concealed, repeating the while in a small voice: 'It was so exciting, so terribly exciting; I know I shall die if I don't find out'" (23–24). The "detective novel, torn in two down its back" echoes in many ways Hermann's own story, which can be read as a peculiar detective tale with a purely literary denouement. The question, ultimately, is not "Who is the murderer?" but rather "Where is the hidden mistake?" that will ruin both the opus and the author.

Van Dine, the classical analyst of the mystery genre, wrote that "The truth must at all times be in the printed word, so that if the reader should go back over the book he would find that the solution had been there all the time if he had had sufficient shrewdness to grasp it.[10] On re-reading his manuscript Hermann involuntarily becomes the detective in his own story and discovers the hidden clue. The "S-T-I-C-K" forgotten in the car and bearing the initials of the victim is the fatal object that causes Hermann's despair and gives the title to his tale. At least ten times in the course of the story the reader is reminded of this awkward stick, and ten times Hermann fails to take notice of it.

The irony of the situation is that Hermann's tale, designed to prove his genius as a murderer, is instead proof of his failure. The mnemonic device, the "stick," serves not only as the symbol of Hermann's fall, but also as the instrument with which the indignant Nabokov chastises the hero for his crime. This is then the concluding portion of Hermann's peculiar detective and, alas, defective tale in which one hero was to impersonate the author, the murderer, the victim, and, finally, the detective and the reader in his own mystery.

Nabokov's Novel of the Doubles

A Latin proverb reads: "Quem Jupiter vult perdere dementat prius" ("Those whom Jupiter would destroy he first makes mad"). Up to this point we have chiefly been concerned with Hermann and his tale; we should not forget, however, that *Despair* is also the title of Nabokov's novel. It remains for us to answer the question "How can the work of two authors exist under the same title, indeed, be the same text?"

Between the covers of *Despair* resides yet another writer. Hermann alludes to him repeatedly, has chosen him to be his first reader, and prepares to send him the manuscript of his tale. "There . . . I have mentioned you, my first reader, you, the well-known author of psychological novels. I have read them and found them very artificial, though not badly constructed. What will you feel, reader–writer, when you tackle my tale? Delight? Envy? Or even . . . who knows? . . . you may use my termless removal to give out my stuff for your own . . . for the fruit of your own crafty . . . yes, I grant you that . . . crafty and experienced imagination; leaving me out in the cold" (80–81). This Russian émigré novelist "whose books cannot possibly appear in the U.S.S.R." (158) is, of course, Sirin (Nabokov's Russian pen name). This enigmatic belletrist, whom Hermann quite unceremoniously addresses in Russian in the second

person familiar, never appears in the novel as a character. Nevertheless, he takes part in the novel as a specter, a ghostly apparition at the service of the author, Nabokov. Sirin, whom Nabokov calls "one of my characters in 'real' life" (*SO* 290), is not so much concerned with psychological matters, but rather deals shrewdly with questions of art. (I use the name Sirin whenever I refer to the "*auctor ex machina*" ["the author from the machine"] who, unseen though detectable, meddles in the events of the novel. In contrast to this literary persona [Sirin], the name Nabokov is reserved for Nabokov the person.) Sirin's invisible pen more than once intrudes on the development of Hermann's tale, and his cryptic handwriting is easily discernible on the pages of his manuscript. "So it goes on and on, Ex writing to Why and Why to Ex, page after page. Sometimes an outsider, a Zed, intrudes and adds his own little contribution to the correspondence, but he does so with the sole aim of making clear to the reader (not looking at him the while except for an occasional squint) some event, which, for reasons of plausibility and the like, neither Ex nor Why could very well have explained" (60). Although Hermann tries to downplay the significance of the unknown "Zed," he occasionally notices that his "pen has mixed steps and wantonly danced away" (88). Sirin, who is the literary saboteur and spoiler, spreads through the novel a fine net of traps, tricks, and other devices, all designed to ensnare the hero and destroy his smug illusions. One of the more refined harassing devices built into the novel is the peculiar variant of the myth of Narcissus and Nemesis.

After the first encounter of the doubles, Felix offers Hermann his hand. Hermann grasps it because it provides him "with the curious sensation of Narcissus fooling Nemesis" (13). After the murder Hermann looks at Felix's face and it seems to him "as if [he] were looking at [his] own image in a stagnant pool" (172). But Nemesis is not to be fooled for long. Sirin, like a mythical deity, assumes the form of an errant breeze to spitefully distort the image seen in the pool. Hermann takes note of this wind-blown intrusion: "thus a breeze dims the bliss of Narcissus; thus, in the painter's absence, there comes his pupil and by the superfluous flush of unbidden tints disfigures the portrait painted by the master" (15). A draft from the same source also penetrates Hermann's nightmare: "I saw . . . a cart rut brimming with rainwater, and in that wind-wrinkled puddle the trembling travesty of my face; which, as I noticed with a shock, was eyeless" (51). In chapter 3, "a puff of smoke" coming from Hermann's cigarette is "folded by ghostly fingers" before melting away in midair (55). The same wind follows Hermann also in chapter 5. Here, however, the quick-witted Hermann evades the pursuing gusts: "I walked for a pretty long time down the side street which led me away from the statue, and at every other step I stopped, trying to light my cigarette, but the wind kept filching my light until I took shelter under a porch, thus blasting the blast—what a pun" (69). But Hermann is not fated to be the victor for long. Toward the end of the book, the wind rises again. In the novel's penultimate chapter Hermann notes that "a strong wind from Spain worried the chick fluff of the

mimosas" (181). The wind soon increases in force, and the hero notices from his window "the wind roughly upturning the several petticoats of olive trees which it tumbled" (182). The wind forces Hermann to stay indoors: "It frightened me, that thunder in my head, that incessant crashing, blinding March wind, that murderous mounting draft" (182). On the sixth day of Hermann's stay in the hotel, Sirin (Prospero-like) conjures up a tempest: "the wind became so violent that the hotel could be likened to a ship at sea in a tempest: windowpanes boomed, walls creaked; and the heavy evergreen foliage fell back with a receding rustle and then lurching forward, stormed the house. I attempted to go out into the garden, but at once was doubled up, retained my hat by a miracle and went up to my room" (183). As Hermann's manuscript increases in size, so does the wind in force. The six days are the six days of creation in which Hermann brings his own world into being in his tale. The "chick fluff of the mimosas," "the several petticoats of the olive trees," "the heavy evergreen foliage" are all realizations of the metaphoric juxtaposition of "tree leaves" and "leaves of a manuscript," to which Nabokov returns also in other works.[11] It is Hermann's manuscript, the very pages of the tale, that the frivolous author–imp has chosen to destroy, assuming for the purpose the form of a whimsical wind. (To paraphrase Blok's poem "The Artist," here not a "whirlwind from the seas sings in the leaves," but rather the "heavenly Sirins," the human birds of Russian mythology, from whom Nabokov derives his pen name, Sirin.)[12]

In chapter 11, Hermann, not yet having finished the last, tenth chapter of his tale, ventures into the hotel's garden and feels "a heavenly, soft stillness": "At first I did not even realize what was the matter, but I shook myself and suddenly understood, the hurri*cane* [italics added] wind which had been raging lately was stilled. [. . .] The air was divine, there drifted about the silky floss of sallows; even the greenery of indeciduous leafage tried to look renovated; and the half-bared, athletic torsos of the cork oaks glistened a rich red" (197). It would be a mistake, however, to consider this "heavenly stillness" the creator's well-deserved reward after the six days of labor during which he delivers his tale. It is much more likely that this is the eye of the hurricane, a breathing space before the shattering denouement. Hermann gathers from the floor the scattered pages of his manuscript and, full of anticipation (ignoring several unsuccessful attempts to light his extinguished cigarette),[13] prepares to read them for the last time. But soon "the delicate foretaste [changes] to something like pain—to a horrible apprehension, as if an evil imp were promising to disclose to [him] more and more blunders and nothing but blunders" (201). Hermann reads up to the fateful scene where the importunate "S-T-I-C-K" with Felix's initials is mentioned, which destroys all his cherished illusions about being a perfect murderer.

It is Sirin who, rustling his wings, ruffled the pool's surface and dimmed Narcissus' bliss; now he filches Hermann's light and shrieks "that the rabble which refused [Hermann] recognition" was right (203). It is Sirin who

torments Hermann, caning him with the disreputable wand, and eventually drives him to *despair* and madness.

In the novel *The Gift*, the accredited hero-writer Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev states that "any genuinely new trend [in art] is a knight's move, a change of shadows, a shift that displaces the mirror" (*Gift* 239). Having confronted the hero with his error, Sirin forces Hermann to also ruin his tale's symmetrical ten-chapter scheme by adding an extra chapter. In the eleventh chapter Hermann's tale "degenerates into a diary, the lowest form of literature" (208) or, more precisely, into a "diary of a madman." With a sleight of hand the *auctor ex machina* has shifted the axis of symmetry of the hero's tale, the mirror Hermann had placed between chapters 5 and 6 upon whose surface the two parts of the tale were supposed to meet. The "shattered mirror" is for Hermann "the weirdest of all omens" (24). After this blow to his tale, the mirror-worshipper's passion turns into hatred: "There is, thank God, no mirror in the room, no more than there is the God I am thanking" (210). The shift of the mirror finally returns the power, which was temporarily usurped by the literary pretender, Hermann, to the legitimate author.

For Nabokov the only real number is one. No likenesses exist, only analogies. Just as Hermann creates Felix in his own image, so does Nabokov create Hermann. Just as Felix pockets Hermann's silver pencil (14), Hermann misappropriates Nabokov's pen, his manuscript. *Despair* is a novel about the concept of similarity, about doubles. But the reader knows that "it is the vulgar who note resemblance," and think that "all Chinamen are alike" (41). If the likeness between Hermann and Felix (save the "lilac tie") is not really there, then it follows that there should likewise be no real resemblance between Hermann and Nabokov (save a tinge of lilac from the name "Sirin" on Hermann's tie).[14] They are linked by the act of creation, but this is a mere analogy.

In a fit of "cacographic debauchery," deeming himself a god,[15] Hermann creates a man, his double, forgetting in his demiurgic hubris that he himself is a creature. It is here, in the opposition of the demiurgic and divine principles, that we find the crucial difference between Hermann and Nabokov and their respective works. To his own indignation, Hermann has to confess his inferior position as a character in someone else's novel, but he does not allow himself to be reconciled to it. He wages a desperate battle for authorship with his creator. As A. Field suggests, it is correct to interpret the "theological joke" in chapter 6 in light of the clash between the author and the hero.[16] Hermann openly rebels against his absurd position as a puppet in an alien work: "The nonexistence of God is simple to prove. Impossible to concede, for example, that a serious Jah, all wise and almighty, could employ his time in such inane fashion as playing with manikins. . . . There is yet another reason why I cannot, nor wish to, believe in God: the fairy tale about him is not really mine, it belongs to strangers, to all men; it is soaked through by the evil-smelling effluvia of millions of other souls that have spun about a little under the sun

and then burst. . . . There are, however, no grounds for anxiety: God does not exist, as neither does our hereafter, that second bogey being as easily disposed of as the first" (101–102). On first reading, this monologue of Hermann's bears little relation to the rest of the tale; nonetheless, this mock-Karamazovian sally against the creator is the key to a proper understanding of the novel.[17] From this clash between two rival artists the author emerges victorious, and Hermann's failure, while not without flair, remains a failure. Having destroyed his character's symmetrical tale, the author uses it as the basis for his own novel, presenting the hero's fall as his own victory. In this sense, *Despair* is a novel about the primacy of the author's consciousness.

In his 1937 article, V. Khodasevich, a poet and critic whom Nabokov greatly admired, wrote about *Despair*: "It shows the suffering of an original, self-disciplined artist. His downfall is brought about by one error, one misstep, which, once admitted into the text, gobbles up the fruits of his creative labors. . . . Hermann is driven to despair because he alone is responsible for his downfall, because he is only talented but not a genius."[18] Nabokov has no patience with a writer's weaknesses, be it a character in fiction or a real author. He recognizes only genius and gives short shrift to unfortunate talents. For Nabokov only genuine art is capable of stepping over the bounds within which mortal man is confined and of rendering itself immortal. One can only agree with Rosenfield, who defines Hermann's leading motive as "a modern perversion of the primitive's longing for immortality."[19] Nabokov informs his hero in no uncertain terms that the path of immortality through art is closed to him. The Nabokovian syllogism, "*Other men die, but I / Am not another; therefore I'll not die*" (*PF* 40), does not apply in Hermann's case. Both Hermann's sacrifice (Felix) as well as his sacred text (the tale) will be rejected by the gods.

There is no doubt that a cruel, mythical vengeance hangs over Hermann, reminding us once more of the punishment Nemesis visited upon Narcissus. Through her the Olympians chastised humans for their hubris, vanity, and unnatural acts. Likewise Nabokov, in his Olympian indignation, punishes his narcissistic hero for his prideful act. *Despair* is, in the final analysis, a novel in which the character behaves with loathsome arrogance and caddishness. Because of the sin of pride, Dante placed Satan (who "against his Maker dared his brows to raise") in the lowest circle of hell. For this reason, Hermann's inevitable death on the scaffold (cf. 56, 109, 203, 209, 210), while the end of his suffering in this world, is only the beginning of his suffering in the next. We shall see what variety of hereafter the incensed author has prepared for his blasphemous hero, who rejected both God and the possibility of an afterlife.

Nabokov gives his hero and reader the answer to the novel's final question in the form of riddles. The first is found in the irrational handwriting by which Sirin toys with Hermann, in the manner of Alice manipulating the pen of the puzzled White King. Hermann writes a letter to Felix while "the consumptive pen" in his hand goes on spitting words: "can't stop, can't stop, cans, pots, stop,

he'll to hell" (117–18). Hermann will end in hell, reads the author's message. The second hint at Hermann's future whereabouts is found in his "nasty dream" in chapter 3. It is presented in the form of a literary charade: "For several years I was haunted by a very singular and very nasty dream: I dreamed I was standing in the middle of a long passage with a door at the bottom, and passionately wanting, but not daring to go and open it, and then deciding at last to go, which I accordingly did; but at once awoke with a groan, for what I saw there was unimaginably terrible; to wit, a perfectly empty, newly whitewashed room. That was all, but it was so terrible that I never could hold out" (46). This room, calling to mind Raskolnikov's "eternal solitude on a hand's breadth of ground" or Svidrigailov's eternity in "one little room,"[20] is the hell Sirin has prepared for the spawn of Satan and scion of Cain. In the English version of the novel Nabokov installs a chair in the otherwise bare, whitewashed room (a possible allusion to an electric chair?), thus creating a somewhat diluted variant of the characteristically Russian hells of Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov.[21]

Sirin also torments Hermann in the next dream, which is induced by Hermann's impious puns: "What is this jest in majesty? This ass in passion? How God and Devil combine to form a live dog?" (46). The last pun is borrowed from Joyce,[22] and Sirin seems to have a fitting Joycean answer to Hermann's last question. The following oneiric retribution is a grotesque realization of Hermann's irreverent God–dog palindrome in which the "evil god" shows Hermann his mirror-inverted face: "I dreamed a loathsome dream, a triple ephialtes. First there was a small dog; but not simply a small dog; a small mock dog, very small, with the minute black eyes of a beetle's larva; it was white through and through, and coldish. . . . A cold-blooded being, which Nature had twisted into the likeness of a small dog with a tail and legs, all as it should be. . . . I woke up. On the sheet of the bed next to mine there lay curled up, like a swooned white larva, that very same dreadful little pseudo dog. . . . I groaned with disgust and opened my eyes. All around shadows floated; the bed next to mine was empty except for the broad burdock leaves which, owing to the damp, grow out of bedsteads. One could see, on those leaves, telltale stains of a slimy nature; I peered closer; there, glued to a fat stem it sat, small, tallowish-white, with its little black button eyes . . . but then, at last, I woke up for good" (96–97). It is tempting see in this last nightmare of Hermann's the ultimate variant of his future, postmortem habitation. Whenever he wakes up in his grave, Hermann finds his "little white pseudo dog," the "poor dogsbody's body," in a more advanced state of decay.[23]

We will not reproach Hermann who concludes that "God does not exist, as neither does our hereafter" (102) for returning to his creator a ticket to such an eternity. It is, however, amusing to note that in the foreword to the English edition of *Despair*, published some thirty years after the novel first appeared, the unforgiving author returns to remind the hero of his otherworldly abode: "Hermann and Humbert are alike only in the sense that two dragons painted

by the same artist at different periods of his life resemble each other. Both are neurotic scoundrels, yet there is a green lane in Paradise where Humbert is permitted to wander at dusk once a year; but Hell shall never parole Hermann" (xiii).

Sergej Davydov

Notes

1. It was excerpted in *Poslednie novosti* in Paris in 1932–33, serialized in *Sovremennye zapiski*, nos. 54–56, 1934, pp. 108–161, 70–116, and appeared in book form in Berlin: Petropolis, 1936. Nabokov's own translation into English, *Despair* (London: John Long, 1937), was followed by a French translation from the English by Marcel Stora, *La Méprise* (Paris: Gallimard, 1939). In 1965 Nabokov undertook a new translation and considerably modified the novel. The new version of *Despair* was published by Putnam's in 1965. The present essay is based on my article, "The Shattered Mirror: A Study of Nabokov's Destructive Method in *Despair*," *Structuralist Review*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Winter 1981), pp. 25–38.
2. Quoted in Field, 1967, pp. 231–32.
3. In 1949 Nabokov had the pleasure to reciprocate in kind. In his review of Sartre's first novel *La Nausée* for the *New York Times Book Review* (April 24, 1949), Nabokov brands Sartre a "café philosopher" and declares his novel second rate: "Somewhere behind looms Dostoevsky at his worst, and still farther back there is old Eugène Sue, to whom the melodramatic Russian owed so much" (*SO* 229).
4. Pifer, 1980, pp. 97–118. See also Davydov, "Dostoevsky and Nabokov."
5. Foster, 1993, pp. 91–109.
6. De Quincey, 1968, p. 17.
7. Ibid., p. 39. In his triptych, De Quincey devotes particular attention to the famous murderer Williams, whom he calls "the most aristocratic and fastidious of artists." De Quincey describes in detail Williams' two murders, which stunned England in December 1811, and which might stun the literary critic willing to accept certain analogies between the murderers Williams and Hermann. As in the case of Williams (the mallet with initials), so in the case of Hermann (Felix's stick bearing initials)—both criminals are exposed by very similar objects. In both cases the newspapers do not mention anything about the existence of the incriminatory object, and thus give the criminal the chance to commit another crime. In Williams' case the second crime was the murder of the Williamsons; in Hermann's, it is his work of art, the tale. Both Williams and Hermann commit their second criminal act as proof that the first such act is a work of genius. The near duplication of the name of the victims and murderer (Williams and Williamson) is echoed in the supposed likeness between the doubles (Hermann and Felix). We should not, however, continue enumerating the similarities because, as it is written in *Despair*, "it is the vulgar who note resemblance" (p. 41), and in De Quincey's words, "This vulgar gout de comparison . . . will be our ruin; each work has its own separate characteristics—each in and for itself is incomparable" (p.

58). Rather than accuse Hermann of plagiarism, let us conclude the following: Hermann's tale can be seen as the full realization of De Quincey's concept of "murder considered as one of the fine arts," with the difference that Hermann, actually equating murder and art, turns De Quincey's simile into a metaphor, and the murderer into an artist proper, a writer.

8. The final chapter was not foreseen by Hermann. It was, rather, written after he had discovered, on re-reading his tale, the fatal error. Therefore, it belongs not to Hermann's tale, but to Nabokov's novel. Chapter 11 will be discussed in the second part of this essay.
9. Nabokov returns to the image of a falling petal, meeting its reflection on the water surface, in *Speak, Memory*, pp. 270–71, where he compares it to "the magic precision of a poet's word meeting halfway his, or reader's recollection."
10. W. Wright (Van Dine), 1936, p. 9.
11. In the poem "Slava" ("Fame"): "'Your poor books,' he breezily said, 'will finish / by hopelessly fading in exile. Alas / those two thousand leaves of frivolous fiction / will be scattered; but genuine foliage has / a place where to fall: there's the soil, there's Russia / there's a path drenched by maples in violet blood. . . .'" (*PP* 107).
12. Blok, "The Artist": "S moria li vikhr'? Ili siriny raiskie / V list'iakh poiut . . ." (Is it the storm from the sea? Or are the heavenly Sirins singing in the foliage . . .).
13. Sirin's "ghostly fingers" hid Hermann's matchbox, significantly, behind the inkpot (201).
14. Hermann's "favorite lilac tie" (152, 169), which he ties around Felix's neck, makes the doubles resemble each other as much as the color of that tie resembles Nabokov's pen name. The puns on the word "siren'" (lilac) and "Sirin" play an important role in the text, but Hermann fails to decipher them: "The public garden, where invalids were hand-pedaling about, was a storm of heaving *lilac* bushes. I looked at shop signs; picked out some word concealing a Slav root familiar to me, though overgrown with an unfamiliar meaning" (6).
15. "In his 'genius' [Hermann] is like a god—but a god gone mad," says C. Rosenfield in the article "*Despair* and the Lust for Immortality," p. 74.
16. Field, 1967, p. 251.
17. Hermann's attack on God reminds us, however, more of Alice, unwilling to reconcile herself to the thought of existing only in the Red King's dream. The monologue's central position in the novel testifies to its importance: although it could have been written only after chapter 10, Hermann places it at the beginning of chapter 6, that is, exactly in the middle not of his ten-chapter tale, but of Nabokov's eleven-chapter novel.
18. V. Khodasevich, "O Sirine" ("On Sirin").
19. Rosenfield, p. 73.
20. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*. Trans. J. Coulson, ed. G. Gibian. New York: Norton, 1975, part 2, ch. 6. See also part 4, ch. 1: "Eternity is always presented to us as an idea which it is impossible to grasp, something enormous, enormous. But why should it necessarily be enormous? Imagine, instead, that it will be one *little room*, something like a bath-house in the country, black with soot, with spiders in every corner, and that is the whole of eternity."
21. The insertion of a chair into this 1965 version of Hermann's dream can have, however, a more bizarre motivation. In this dream the reader might discern Nabokov's mocking allusion to the "earliest dream" of C.G. Jung, which "haunted [Jung] for years." In his

dream Jung, "hesitantly and fearfully," descends through a hole in the ground (grave) into a doorway, closed off by a heavy curtain. He pushes it aside and sees before him a "rectangular chamber" with a "golden throne." On it stands a "huge thing of a curious composition, made of skin and naked flesh." On the very top of its faceless head shines a "single eye, gazing motionlessly upward." This dream, Jung believes, represents a descent into "the underground temple" of the afterlife. The monstrously enthroned phallus is identified by Jung as a "subterranean God" and associated with "Lord Jesus"; see Jung, 1963, pp. 11–13. It is not without interest that Hermann in this new version of the dream claims to know "*whom*" (Nabokov's italics) he would find next time in the chair-furnished room. "Stretching up with a hammer and mouthful of nails," Hermann is, however, unable to crucify this bizarre god whose existence he refutes. He spits out the nails and never opens "that door again" (46–47). The proof that Nabokov intends the grotesque author/phallus juxtaposition can be found also in the translator's peculiar "slip of pen." The Russian anagram involving the names Nabokov and Sirin: "siren' v nabokoi vaze" ("lilac in a leaning vase") Nabokov renders in his English version as "phallic tulips in a leaning vase" (42), and adds thus another of his frivolous gibes at the "Viennese witchdoctor" Freud and his disciples. These motifs were absent in the original version.

22. "The voice of all the damned: Htengier Tnetopinmo Dog Drol eht rof, Aiulella! (From on high the voice of Adonai calls.) Doooooooooog! The voice of all the blessed: Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth! (From on high the voice of Adonai calls.) Gooooooooood!" (*Ulysses*. New York: Vintage, 1961, pp. 599–600). See also the passage concerning "the dog of Stephen's enemy": "A point, live dog, grew into sight running across the sweep of sand. Lord, is he going to attack me? Respect his liberty. You will not be master of others or their slave. I have my stick" (p. 45).
23. Cf. Dostoevsky, *Dvoinik*: "skvernaia sobachenka" ("nasty little dog"); *Ulysses*, p. 46: the "poor dogsbody's body."

ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

History

Between January of 1943 and the end of 1951 Nabokov wrote eight short stories (or ten, depending on definition) in English, a story a year on average, never to compose another thereafter. By the time the first of these stories appeared, Nabokov had published in America two novels (*Laughter in the Dark* and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*), which went largely unnoticed, and a number of poems placed in magazines and silently acknowledged by connoisseurs. His book on Gogol and a small collection of Russian nineteenth-century poetry in his English translations were about to come out, and his next novel, *Bend Sinister*, was on his desk; as the decade wore on, however, his reputation of an admirable prose writer owed more to his short stories published in the *Atlantic Monthly* and later in *The New Yorker* than to all those books put

together. These stories prepared the success of the two books that followed, *Conclusive Evidence* and *Pnin*, themselves serialized under the guise of a string of short stories. However, the acclaim that Nabokov's short stories had earned him seldom spilled into print; rather, it was gathering in the background and sometimes expressed in private letters, over handshakes, or at lecture introductions, in part because the magazine publication of a short story very rarely merits a printed response. On the other hand, the first American collection of Nabokov's short fiction, *Nine Stories*, of which five were original English, was brought out as an issue of the magazine *Direction* that addressed a limited and somewhat quaint readership, and was ignored by reviewers. The second collection, *Nabokov's Dozen*, contained all of the English stories except one, was published in the strong afterglow of *Lolita*'s prime glory, and therefore fared much better, having garnered considerable attention, even if nothing in the way of serious analysis.

Genre

Nabokov certainly knew, none so well, what he was talking about when in response to an interviewer's question he said that the short story could be regarded as an undersized form of the novel, a dwarf variant of the regular species.[1] The example of his own art makes this statement much truer with respect to his English writings than to his Russian ones. His Russian short stories, while sharing with his novels many essential features and evolutionary traits, differ from them not merely in scale but also in structure, in narrative mode, in the choice of dramatic and temporal conditions. The structure of Nabokov's novel is always closed, its thematic fibers sealed, often running its length from beginning to end. Most of his Russian short stories, on the other hand, are open ended, expansive rather than circular. This distinction fades in his later, particularly English, stories; it may be said nonetheless that a typical Nabokov short story is not a self-sufficient world, however small, not a wholly fabricated life—but a *slice of life* invented by another author, as it were, so that existing conditions do not invite, indeed usually will defeat, attempts at reconstructing antecedent events. "The Enchanter," "Spring in Fialta," and "The Eye," ought not to be regarded as short stories surely not because they are long pieces of prose but because they are elaborate enough to carry a curvilinear structure, with thematic clues carefully inwrought along the curve. Likewise, "Ultima Thule," "Solus Rex," "Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster" are opening chapters of a more complex body and not really short stories, not because we simply know this a priori but because important details planted in each one of them are meant to be in joint with the projected but never-written chapters of a novel. Unlike his novels, most of Nabokov's short stories maintain a tight unity of time and almost all, of action. The first principle, again, holds much more consistently in the early stories (of the first two Russian collections), with their predominantly third-person mode of narra-

tion, than in the later ones. And whereas *all* Nabokov's Russian novels but one (not counting the arguable case of "The Eye") employ third-person narration, his short stories yield an entirely different proportion, and his English prose all but abandons the third-person mode altogether: only one such story ("Signs and Symbols") and one or two novels (and both *Bend Sinister* and *Transparent Things* admit of vigorous debate on this score[2]). Moreover, from at least the early thirties on, Nabokov tries in a few short stories a new narrative register that later becomes his main patent: a bold, epiphanic voice that signals the ordering presence of an overseer who appears when and where it matters most—at the story's entrance, or exit, or both ("The Leonardo," "Recruiting," "A Forgotten Poet").

In short, the difference between the two genres, in Nabokov's hands in any event, proves much more specific than it may seem, his short story often being to his novel what the étude is to the concerto: a different *modus* of artistic expression, not a small-scale version.

Time, Place, and Personae

Nabokov tended to maintain an instinctively set and, within a certain range, surprisingly constant distance between the narrative present of his fiction and that of its composition. His first three English stories are all set in a Russian milieu and narrated by a Russian, sounding a little as though they were translations from Russian originals. In the next three stories, the backdrop changes to contemporary America while the characters remain Russian expatriates (the memoirist of "Time and Ebb," although born in Paris, seems to be the son of an émigré). The narrator of "The Vane Sisters" is a French scholar, a foregoer of the famous trio of European academics in America who would become heroes of Nabokov's successive novels in the next decade. And although the setting of "Lance" is much more American than the cosmopolitan genre of the story might require, the hero is said to be a descendant of the Russian narrator. Thus not once does Nabokov recruit a purely American narrative voice in this series of stories—or, for that matter, in the concurrent and immediately following novels, until *Pale Fire*.

Main Themes

Despite the obvious variety—from literary anecdote to topical dialogue to metaphysics—this body of stories is instinct with a strong personal emotion. The same art that openly works one's personal life into an intricate tale of care and gratitude and love in *Conclusive Evidence* is used here to hide private apprehension and attachments under the folds of ingenious fantasy. Just as *Bend Sinister* and the unfinished novel *Solus Rex* throb with pain from the precedent death of the hero's beloved wife, so a fantastic incarnation of the hero's son becomes a poignant theme in a number of Nabokov's English short

stories (and in the same *Bend Sinister*, of course, as well as in *Pnin* and, with the gender polarity reversed, in *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*). The book of memoirs ends as its first person and the second are about to transport the dear third across the Atlantic, out of pursuing peril; in "Time and Ebb," that third person, now himself a memoirist, recalls in limpid detail the danger, the crossing, and the first imprints of the New World: dusk in Central Park, the milk-bar, the looming towers of Manhattan; but above all the various contemporary editions of speed—cabs, coach trains, airplanes, and motion pictures. In other stories, the boy, who grows apace with the boy of *Conclusive Evidence*'s last chapter, goes through deadly trials, as if exposing a character to horrors in fiction might somehow protect him on another plane or in a totally different world, expanding or thwarting fate's designs by staging, exploring, and enduring them in advance. The nameless youth of "Signs and Symbols" has lost his sanity when the story opens and has prehaps committed suicide as it closes. With his parents, he had to flee Germany and is twenty at the story's present, having been placed in the asylum at sixteen. Lance Boke at *his* twenty-one climbs the skies, evades mortal danger, returns safely but will go back again and again, while his parents swing from tender pride to throttling terror. The story casts forward, into the barely imaginable future, the deepest and noblest of human emotions—filial love and daring, paternal love and fear—in order to show them as immutable in "2145 A.D." as they are in 1951 or as they were in "200 A.A." (Anno Arthurii?).

Technique

Nabokov used the short stories of the 1940s as a proving ground on which to test many designs and discoveries that he had made first trial of in his last Russian fiction of 1937–40 and that later went into his English novels. Retooling necessary for the switch to English as an artistic idiom must have been even more anguished than Nabokov admitted because it was undertaken in the middle of a radical deepening of the mysteries of creation and creativity and of their interrelation. The narrative and structural devices that Nabokov consistently employs in his English short stories—the almost invariable use of first-person narration and the curved, sometimes even circular, composition—he later transfers to every one of his English novels, adjusting for scope but leaving essence and function unchanged. Both have much to do with the new dimension that his fiction has been gradually growing, a dimension that he tried to describe for the thoroughly bewildered *New Yorker* that had rejected "The Vane Sisters," a story written in a highly deceptive manner. It is in that bitter letter to Katharine White that Nabokov reveals, in a flash of frankness unexampled for him in matters of his art and no doubt spurred by the frustration, the inner working of this strategy: "Most of the stories I am contemplating (and some I have written in the past . . .) will be composed on these lines, according to this system wherein a second (main) story is woven

into, or placed behind, the superficial semitransparent one" (*SL* 117). This purposeful complication can be detected in almost every one of his English stories, even though in some its force-field may be negligible ("The Assistant Producer" and particularly "Double Talk"). The brief discourse on each story that follows pays special note to that second plane.

"The Assistant Producer" (written January 1943; published May 1943) is the only story by Nabokov based, as he himself admitted, on "actual facts."[3] The principal actors receive stage names, but the plot is lifted, with very little alteration, from life—the author's "assistant producer" credited in the opening sentence. All Russian expatriates in Europe knew Nadezhda Plevitskaia, the "soulful" songstress of rather crude Russian nostalgia. In 1938, the émigré press followed, with much sordid detail, her trial on charges of complicity, with her husband General Skoblin, in the kidnapping and murder, on the orders of the Soviet secret police, of several leaders of the Russian White movement, Generals Kutepov and Miller and possibly General Wrangel before them (some said he had been poisoned). Plevitskaia was convicted and jailed; Skoblin vanished cleanly, amidst wild rumors spotting him simultaneously on extreme longitudes of Barcelona and Khabarovsk. Most of the "actual facts" have been recently confirmed by a Soviet researcher whom the K.G.B. let peek at some of the secret files that preserved information on the sums the couple was paid for the services rendered and the operettic code names by which they went in the Soviet dossiers ("The Farmer" and "Farmer's Wife")—but even in the late 1980s they refused to shed a fleck of light on Skoblin's fate.[4] In the original version of the story, Nabokov makes him surface in America, as we see him emerging from a movie palace. And this is Nabokov's main design for his first English story—true events, only slightly adjusted for better focus and concatenation, are wrapped in the arrantly fictitious tinsel-foil of a Hollywood production, employing available sundry Russian émigrés as supers and consultants. "Actual facts," Nabokov seems to say, sometimes are less believable than tawdriest fabrication. The story's title is explained in the very first sentence ("Meaning? Well, because sometimes life is merely that—an Assistant Producer"); then it flickers teasingly within the story's framing metaphor, fantastic cinematography: "Ghostly multitudes of ghostly Cossacks on ghost-horseback are seen charging through the fading name of the assistant producer." And immediately thereafter Golubkov (Skoblin) makes his first appearance on stage, as if the credit-roll name of the assistant producer had dissolved into the dapper general's—and it is by this epithet, along with Golubkov's smoking habits and his thick English accent, that any alert reader is supposed to recognize the general in the man at the story's exit. Curiously enough, the final page (two last paragraphs) is omitted in *Nabokov's Dozen* and all subsequent editions, owing perhaps to Nabokov's oversight,[5] and so the story in its presently received form closes abruptly, but symptomatically, with the words ". . . which possibly was the truth." The true assistant producer of the story, the well-informed narrator who reveals the hideous plot at a well-

calculated amble, is a bleary, unapparent figure indeed. Putting together two or three mere glimpses of him, carefully spaced in the narrative, one assembles the character of a former White Army priest who "sits in the front row and looks straight ahead" and who probably used to hear Golubkov's confessions.[6] His name, Father Fiodor, closes the seemingly absurd chain of kindred names, from Chaliapin's first (scribbled by "La Slavska" on the back of her picture) to General Fedchenko's last—something that Nabokov does rather often: there is a typical instance in "Signs and Symbols," where situationally unrelated, marginal characters bear the names of Sol, Solov, and Soloveichik.[7] The very deliberateness of this dotted line of names points to the artificial make-up of this "true story" in much the same way names such as Pushkin's Lensky, Tolstoy's Vronsky, or Shakespeare's Don Adriano de Armado did in less sophisticated times.

"That in Aleppo Once" (May 1943; November 1943), despite its plain appearance, is an involute example of Nabokov's experimentation with a character whose sufferings are so real that he is almost allowed a glimpse of his true condition (i.e., being a character in fiction) but whose implicit death is only a harmless stylistic resolution. The story poses as a letter from a Russian émigré poet, who has escaped from France overcome by Germany to New York and is writing to his friend V., a happy, happily married writer of fiction and a lichenologist in his spare time. The hero, by contrast (precisely the sort of contrast that quickens Nabokov's last novel), is frantic with misery and perplexed to the point of madness because his young wife, who left him in Europe—or perhaps was left behind by him—now appears to be a hurtful delusion, a heart-rending phantom. It is a concentrated study of jealousy on a severe scale, jealousy that is capable of quaking and deforming reality as it is presented by the story's Othello. His version of the events is at odds with his wife's (he reports both, of course), and her version changes radically several times. She admits that she is a liar, but their mutual acquaintances believe her and not him. Material proofs of her very existence are all ungraspable: nameless, featureless ("But I cannot discern her," moans the hero), her much lamented setter being a figment, her New York relatives' address turning out to be a void between two buildings, her vulgar lover, or lovers, probably imagined,—she is at once an object of passion and of sympathy, and seems to come alive only at the point of these forces' impact. The letter-writer "would like to believe the recent past has all been a protracted nightmare," says one critic, "but its rhythms are the inexorable rhythms of reality."[8] But what reality? The poet appeals to the fictionist to solve for him the riddle of his wife's existence by turning his letter into fiction; obliging, V. consistently plies the story with doses of literary reminiscences, creating and underlining an exquisite *illusion* of reality. For instance, a fleeting but pointed Chekhovian image is evoked when a doctor on board ship tells the hero that he had seen his wife walking "rather aimlessly" along the Marseilles embankment (walking the ghost of her dog, to be sure). It is curious that just when she almost becomes,

"for a second," a "real person," her vague features dissolve altogether: "Perhaps I live several lives at once," she says. "Perhaps this bench is a dream. . . ." Indeed it is, yet suffering is real even in a dream, and although it is impossible to tell whether she is a whimsical flirt, or he—a mad Leontes, one thing seems clear enough: when his suffering becomes unbearable, the hero takes his life. Ending his letter, he asks V. to resolve the puzzle of his "fatal mistake" through "the prism of his [V.'s] art" and admits that he is tempted to commit suicide like Othello: "It may all end in Aleppo if I am not careful." In conclusion, he begs his friend to spare him by *not* taking this line for a title, which would then imply that the baffled and unhappy poet has died a Shakespearean death—or never existed. The telltale title nonetheless chosen by V. gives either possibility a nod, letting the reader decide what the hero's "fatal mistake" was: was he "one that loved not wisely but too well . . . perplext in the extreme . . . whose hand like the base Indian threw a pearl away richer than all his tribe," or did he perhaps fail to grasp that his wife, as he himself half-jokingly proposes, was "a character in a story (one of your stories, to be precise)"? Of course, these possibilities can coexist only on planes of two different altitudes.

"A Forgotten Poet" (May 1944; October 1944), the third and last story with a Russian setting (it opens at the time and place of Nabokov's birth), engenders a thoroughly plausible poet Perov, most skillfully engrafted on the Russian literary family tree by the reassuring mingling of historical personages and scenes with wholly fabricated ones. The story contains sharp sketches of the contemporary intelligentsia, with all their noble intentions and peculiar limitations thrown in high relief, and at the end breaks into the darkness of the Soviet era. Not only does the narrator put his poet in an assembled cultural society of his clever invention but he produces marvellously stylized samples of his poetry, recited at an evening in his memory (he was thought long dead), at which Perov, now a scatterwitted reactionary, makes a sensational appearance, much to the painful embarrassment of the liberal admirers of his fierce young poetry. But the story is not merely a high-test literary anecdote told by a noncommittal, flat-voiced storyteller: the strangely engaged, often audibly ironic and personal intonation sets the reader's ears astrain very early. As the plot moves on, the narrator's intrusions become more frequent and obvious, until finally, in a few tricksy, cascading sentences, he calmly tears up and discards the life-like portrait of his hero by declaring to the stunned audience that he might have frivolously "bottled an imp of fiction in the vessel of truth." He then downrates the entire hoax to "secondary importance" and half-slyly, half-wryly repines the fact that in his former native land people know his own works as little as they do Perov's, thus "missing a great deal." One singular effect of this magic performance is that the title, once again, suddenly takes on a new meaning and coloration in retrospect.

The title of the next story, "Time and Ebb" (September 1944; January 1945)—a faint pun that was somewhat intensified in the working title

preserved in the typescript: "Time *in* Ebb"—clouds rather than captures the story's contrivance. The view is projected some eighty years forward, to an out-of-focus future where the narrator, a nonagenarian coeval of Nabokov's own son, reminisces while recuperating from an illness; from there it is reflected back to the early 1940s, into the razor-sharp crispness of things which look fresher and stranger for the magnification and the distance that the round-trip in time has built up. This is one of the finest and most full-blooded examples of the "estrangement" principle in descriptive prose, one that truly makes "a stone stony again." The reader is invited to peer into both ends of the spyglass *at once*, as it were, marvelling at things large and isolated and at the same time strangely and distinctly crowded in receding perspective. In his diary of the early 1950s, Nabokov wrote that he had often "taken pleasure in catching a snooping glimpse of another's future recollection."[9] He describes the sport in detail in one of the earliest Russian stories, "A Guide to Berlin." "Time and Ebb" can be regarded as a guide to war-time Manhattan (and a few other American places) seen by a keen-eyed boy of ten who has kept his "future recollections" fresh. Nabokov stuffs this little story with more curious futuristic trifles than even his interplanetary "Lance." The reader, however, cannot doubt where the real bias is, for Nabokov deftly keeps science on the fringe of fiction, never really mating the two. (It is amusing to note in this regard that for all the profound shock that the discovery of the "true nature of electricity" will have made, for all other "staggering discoveries of the seventies," for all the "allobiotic phenomena" and the "swarming of hesperozoa in a humid valley of the planet Venus," librarians in Nabokov's year of 2024 still "fill the titles" of books manually on index cards!) One peculiar detail will not go unnoticed by any Nabokov reader familiar with the teutonic theme in his writings: the boy, a Jew by blood, fled with his father across the Atlantic from blazing Europe reeling under the German onslaught; at the story's twenty-first-century present, France and Russia have a common border.

The story gains momentum as it nears the end, turning rather unexpectedly to the thrill that speed holds for a boy, particularly in its ultimate contemporary embodiment, airplanes. We see the hero avidly following a war plane, and presently the story is done in two tremendous sentences that allow a glimpse of its secret pathos. The narrator, "tiptoeing away" from his childhood, compares these bass-droning flying machines to a flock of swans of an unknown kind, "never seen before, never seen since," and the ending is as surprising as it is enigmatic. The wistful parting note will reverberate even longer if one realizes that "Knights Lake" in Maine, over which the swans swish, is also unknown; in the already mentioned fair-copy typescript,[10] the name of the fantastic lake is inserted over the thoroughly blackened "Pyramid Lake in Nevada," near the California border, which the Nabokovs must have passed several times on their summer trips to the West. One cannot but make out in this legendary Maine lake a twinkling asterisk pointing to Lancelot du

Lac and the knightly theme in "Lance," another story brimming with Nabokov's paternal love translated in terms of fiction.

"Double Talk" (April 1945; June 1945), retitled "Conversation Piece, 1945" in *Nabokov's Dozen* and all subsequent editions, is Nabokov's most uncharacteristic creation. While fitting perfectly the pages of the *New Yorker* where it first appeared as a fiercely yet elegantly mordant end-of-war political sketch, it is Nabokov's only topical piece of fiction and as such does not quite live up to his standard. Aimed and hurtled at the genteel insipidness of American philistines of the time, with their abject sympathy with the plight of the Germans and antipathy toward the decimated Jews, the story blends Nabokov's elaborate notion of tasteless vulgarity under the veneer of false sophistication (*poshlost'*), which he had recently floated into English circulation in his book on Gogol, with his indignation at the numerous signs of new-fangled Sovietophilia among some Russian émigrés who at the war's end swallowed the Soviet patriotic bait.[11] Colonel Malikov, a *rouge-et-noire* caricature of that type, would reappear in several of Nabokov's novels under various names, most vividly as Komarov in *Pnin*, but "Double Talk" also stresses Nabokov's conviction that *poshlost'* unites its exponents in one huge club without any regard for nationality, sex, or social position. "Double Talk" seems to sag under the load of publicism; its uncommonly profuse, parodically sharpened dialogue cannot sustain its structure, even though it is interjected now and then with bits of superb observations. Nabokov consolidates the friable plot by making its ends meet: the story opens and closes with a brief appearance of the narrator's complete namesake, but this time Nabokov's favorite structural device fails to cure the thing's perishable topicality.

It is worthy of note that "Signs and Symbols" (May 1947; May 1948) is the only English short story Nabokov wrote in regular third person—in a quiet, compassionate, but firm voice originating outside the story. None of his short stories has commanded nearly as much attention of some of the most astute Nabokov students as this one.[12] Nabokov's biographer considers it "one of the greatest short stories ever written . . . a triumph of economy and force, minute realism and shimmering mystery."[13] Economy indeed: in the course of 118 uncharacteristically short sentences that make up the story Nabokov carefully avoids naming any one of the three principal characters—a difficult feat that he had already attempted in the vaster space of "The Enchanter." Moreover, the main personage never appears on stage. He is the only son of two elderly Russian émigrés, a young man of twenty, who for the last four years has been kept in a mental asylum. His peculiar insanity, called *mania referentia*, consists in relating outside objects and phenomena to his person in a menacing way, as if he were a focal point of continuous and hostile ecological scrutiny and machinations. He had attempted, not for the first time, to take his life on the eve of his parents' visit on his birthday, so that they were not allowed to see him and had to take back with them the present they had brought—ten little jars of assorted fruit jellies. Around midnight that very Friday, after they have

decided to bring their son home next day, a sudden telephone ring, then another, grips their old hearts with fright. In each case, the same girl has misdialed, it appears. They sit down to their late tea, and as the father is reading the jelly labels, the phone rings for the third time, and the curtain falls. But the hushed audience lingers: Has the young man finally torn "a hole in his world and escaped"? Or perhaps, as one acute interpreter has recently suggested, the reader is invited to imagine "a moment of panic prolonged to infinity, with the telephone still ringing and the mother's hand still stretching towards the receiver"?[14] Several others have cleverly argued that Nabokov mesmerizes the reader into seeing the disaster beyond the story's boundary by infecting him with exactly the sort of referential mania that clouds the young man's mind, so that the sharper and more attentive the reader the surer he is enmeshed. For all its magnetic ingenuity, this line of argument discounts the importance of evidence pointing to the tragic end which comes about through a chain of secret signals and not by force of a crafty syllogism. The title once again carries a double load, meaning as a set phrase a chart of referential codes appended to an atlas. Not only does Nabokov shirr the length of the story with a series of omens but he also tells the reader that the signs are all mapped and coordinated. Some of them are trivial (it's a Friday; the subway train suddenly loses its "life current") or obvious (an attempt at suicide on a birthday; father's twitching hand resembling the half-dead, twitching bird fallen out of a nest and seen a moment earlier), others are vague (the "kind shock" at the sight of a girl weeping on the bus) and tenuous (the letter O that Charlie's girlfriend erroneously dials for the zero; incidentally, this o–zero, the ovoid emblem of a void, appears later in *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*[15]), but together they all unite to confer a designative value on themselves. One signpost tends to be underestimated although its value increases greatly for the fact that it is the very first *and* the very last item in the series of the story's internal references: if nothing else, Nabokov's propensity for rounded structures alone should warrant our redoubled attention to the set of jelly jars. But it is not simply a frame. When the woman hands her husband the basket with the jellies but not the keys to their flat, thus making him wait on the stair-landing for her return, the incident seems to be more than yet another mishap of that sad Friday: it assumes in retrospect a queer symbolism, as though that undelivered gift *were*, in another dimension, a key to the invisible over-plot. In the last sentence, the old man is halfway through the labels on the jars when the final call comes, and the reader should not fail to realize that the jellies are arranged in the order of increasing astringency, from pungent-sweet to tartish to tart. The five flavors somehow answer the five photographs of her son that the woman examined an hour earlier; and those pictures recorded the five stages of the incremental occlusion of his mind (baby, then aged four, six, eight, and ten). The gift had been selected as a "dainty and innocent trifle," one that would not frighten the young man by an evil reference, as any "man-made object" inevitably would. Instead, the old couple decides not to leave it in the sanitarium and brings

home the basket of jars that perhaps is charged with ominous reference to other signs and ultimately to the tragic outcome their concordance predicts.

Nor is the double entendre of the title an "innocent trifle," nor even the curious string of uniradical names of otherwise unrelated marginal characters, the Soloveichiks—Dr. Solov—Mrs. Sol, that may imply that the pre-charted coincidences are not "man-made." Or does it imply more? For instance, that the doctor and the neighboring lady are of Russian extraction and may even be related to the Soloveichiks (their names being typical New World dockings of long Slavic names, this one meaning "little nightingale") whom the old lady recalls in a spasm of compassion, in the depth of her own grief? Whether leading to a secret passage or a cul-de-sac, these signals can hardly be taken for a word game or a reference-hunt game, in a story welling with pain, love, and gentle sympathy, a story bemoaning the waste of "the incalculable amount of tenderness contained in the world." Nabokov later would single out "Signs and Symbols" as an example of a story with a second plane "woven into, or placed behind, the superficial semitransparent one" (*SL* 117). The "superficial" story paints an unforgettable picture of piercing sadness. Here is how the invisible *main* story envelops the obvious: "From within the parents' world, their son's death seems simply more jagged glass on the pile of miseries that makes up their life. But from outside their vantage point, we can see that *if* the boy has died, then the story bears the mark of a tender concern that shapes every minute detail of a world that from within seems unrelieved, meaningless tragedy. The final blow of death, in one light so gratuitous, in another seems the very proof of the painstaking design behind every moment of their lives."[16] One can see here a scantling of the concentric pattern that all of Nabokov's English novels would reproduce to much larger scale.

The two stories Nabokov wrote next were not properly short stories, although both were to be enlisted in *Nabokov's Dozen*. "First Love" (February [?] 1948; July 1948), published as "Colette" in *The New Yorker*, was really a chapter from the book of memoirs then in progress. It certainly has many distinct features of a Nabokovian short story: a resiliently arching structure held up by recurrent images; fluid transitions; rich half-hidden lode of meaning showing its gleam now and then. For instance, the Basque theme of Section Two spawns, toward the end, an aside on the vernacular term for butterfly, *misericoletea*, as Nabokov claims his memory has retained it—or rather adjusted it (actually, it is *misirikote*) in order to prefigure the stage name he gives to the heroine who is about to appear from the wings ("Colette"'s real name was Claude). Of course, the point here is not euphony: the Basque theme introduces the pains and ardors of love, elopement, and parting—all smoothed down by the memorist's gentle smile, for, unlike the plot of Carmen, his involves two children whose escape to the cinema is amusing, whose parting is harmless, and whose love is their first. It all would soon spin into a strong-pulsating theme in *Lolita* where one of the two grows up while the other remains a girlchild.

As for the structure, it is engirded by the governing metaphor of circular velocity: a derailed toy engine in a memorable dream seen while on a real Biarritz-bound train, its wheels "still working gamely," transforms in the end into Colette's playing hoop "glinting through light and shade, around and around," and then dissolves completely among the many circular forms of the final sentence. And yet the all but perfect identity of the narrator and the reminiscing author, the clear upper hand given to memory over imagination, set "First Love" apart from the body of short stories.

"Scenes from the Life of a Double Monster" (October 1950; March 1958) was intended to be the first chapter of a novel, or a three-part novella, about Siamese twins who marry two separate girls. The narrator is the survivor of a severing operation, but he is also doomed to die shortly after his book is written. No continuation was ever written, and it remains a brightly picturesque piece of an absent whole, sporting magically seamless transitions whose interlinked chain is left dangling at the end.

Put out eight years after it was composed (February 1951; February 1959), "The Vane Sisters" became Nabokov's last original story published. *The New Yorker*, which liked "Signs and Symbols" so much and which a few months later would agree to place the vertiginous "Lance," suddenly demurred in this case citing the overwhelming web of style and lightness of matter as the reasons for rejection. Curiously enough, the real reason, unperceived by the editors, seems to have stemmed from the inertia of narrative convention: both adjacent stories are written either in the third person ("Signs and Symbols") or *at a remove* ("Lance"). It was precisely the first-person mode that set the readers ill at ease, a simplistic reaction whose effect increased manifold in the case of *Lolita*. In the already cited letter to one of the editors, Nabokov explains that for him style *is* matter and then proceeds to reveal the story's inner design and teleology (*SL* 115–18). For the nonce, he takes pains to describe his prodigiously convolute method of making the highly intelligent and highly observant narrator attractive and believable at first blush while planting in the very texture of his narration charges of silent action that explode his trustworthiness and thus compromise his characterizations, his views, and his person. The French professor of "The Vane Sisters" is just this sort of narrator. Steered one Sunday by the scintillating interplay of dripping icicles and their shadows and later that day fascinated by the rubicund shadow cast by a parking meter near a neon-lit restaurant, he runs into a former colleague. The latter tells him that Cynthia Vane has died, which prompts recollection of her sister Sybil who used to be the narrator's student and his married colleague's mistress, and who had taken her life because of the affair. The French professor then recaptures Cynthia, of whom he saw much one time in New York: her looks, her painting, her habits, and particularly her peculiar belief that ghosts of the newly dead may send gentle but ciphered signals to persons with whom they associated while alive. While Cynthia was alive, he dismissed this "aural" notion, as he did almost everything else about her, with a shrug of amused condescension; now,

alone in his room at night, informed of her recent death, he dreads to receive even the slightest evidence in support of Cynthia's theory. Nothing much happens; the dream he has is chaotic and blurry, but when in the morning he sets it on paper, the first letters of his words form, unbeknown to him, a message from the spectral sisters divulging that the bright icicles and the tinted shadow, and the consequent chain of events, were all arranged by them. The message-carrying acrostic is by no means easy to detect, and although he wrote to Katharine White that the alert reader should slip into the solution "automatically," Nabokov in later publications resigned himself to supplying it in a brief foreword.[17] True, the end of chapter 4 hints clearly enough at the cryptograph's type (acrostic), location (last paragraph of a "novel or short story"), the cryptographer ("some contemporary writer"), and general content (a message from the dead). But everything immediately preceding that place, and much of what follows, deliberately and thoroughly discredits the very possibility of a code. Its singularity ("can be tried only once in a thousand years of fiction," Nabokov exclaims) makes it invisible, despite an audible change in diction and tone of the last paragraph: words suddenly sound strangely muffled and doleful ("Everything seemed yellowly-blurred, illusive, lost").

But the entire story is, in a sense, encoded. In his letter to Katharine White, Nabokov reveals the well-hidden intention to dispel the hypnotic effect of the narrator's would-be unassailable authority (cf. *Despair*, *The Eye*, "The Enchanter," *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*). Artfully he presents his storyteller to a discriminative eye as "a rather callous observer of the superficial planes of life" who is incapable of sensing its tenderness and is therefore denied access to its mysteries, such as the "icicle-bright aura through which he rather ridiculously passes in the beginning of the story when a sunny ghost leads him, as it were, to the place where he meets D. and learns of Cynthia's death." The only thing about Cynthia that earns his praise is her art, particularly her wintry landscapes and still lives; that Sunday her ghost makes him a gift "of an iridescent day (giving him something akin to the picture he had liked)" (*SL* 116). The dream he reviews in vain in the last passage—hazy and patchy in one dimension, but in another rippling athwart its current with the dead sisters' salute—is pierced with the cloudburst remindful of their last meeting. Indeed, this story has more inset clues than "Signs and Symbols." Some are relatively clear, such as Wilde's visitation at the table-turning séance: Sibyl Vane kills herself because of Dorian Gray's singular stone-heartedness, and the dead author speaks in "garbled French" because he is addressing the supercilious Frenchman; or the suggestive versicle dictated by the specter of Frederic Meyers, English anagogue. Many others are contestable. For instance, does the mention of "wonderfully detailed images of metallic things" in Cynthia's pictures point back to the parking meter with its carmine shadow? Did the recently crumpled sheet of paper which rustles as it unfurls in the waste-basket in the dead of night startling the sleepless professor contain his scribblings of chance acrostics he had found in Shakespeare's sonnets? After all, at least three of the four

sonnets so diligently identified in the text align well with the story's theme of moral heights: gentleness, unselfishness, forgiveness, noble generosity of soul (specially evident in CXX: "That you were once unkind—befriends me now" etc.). Nabokov seems to move us to reread these poems—not as the professor does it, running down the first letters of Shakespeare's lines in search of perfectly "inept acrostics," but reading them the way they were written, left to right. Had the professor endeavored to do so, he might have been touched more by the meaning of words than he was by the falsely meaningful or mocking "fate," "atom," and "Taft" that he bagged in his acrostic hunt; he might have become, paradoxically, more alert to the message running crosswise his dream.

"'The Vane Sisters' sums up a great deal of Nabokov's art," says his biographer,[18] listing the crisp recreation of the "outer world of shine and sludge" as well as the inner world of human passion and compassion—and the possibility of the *other* world's superimposing the outer in an attempt to touch the inner.

"Lance" was the last short story Nabokov was ever to write (September 1951; February 1952). As said before, almost all his English fiction is of the first-person variety, the rare exceptions being works composed under the strongest of personal impulses. In the 1940s, all such works had to do with the theme of fatherly love, and so the novel about a boy tortured to death (*Bend Sinister*) is written in a clear third-person register save the epilogue, and so is the story of the deranged and suicidal young man, while "Time and Ebb" is narrated *by the son* extrapolated eighty years forward. In "Lance," perhaps his most pointedly intimate story, Nabokov employs the first-person narrator *once removed*: Lance Boke is a "more or less remote descendant" of his,[19] whereas he himself is "fifty and terrified." It is saturated with stoic love of the parents for their brave son, the noble-bred love that cannot help but grant unfettered freedom to its object, even at the pain of certain peril and possible death. The son is moved to the stars by an insatiable and heroic love for quest and discovery; his parents love him with an unselfish love that is akin to the one that moves those very "*altre stelle*." In the last chapter of his memoir written shortly before "Lance," Nabokov writes: "Whenever I start thinking of my love for a person, I am in the habit of immediately drawing radii from my love—from my heart, from the tender nucleus of a personal matter—to monstrously remote points of the universe. Something impels me to measure the consciousness of my love against such unimaginable and incalculable things as the behavior of nebulae . . . I must know where I stand, where you and my son stand" (*SM* 296–7). Nabokov's son was at the time an infatuated and ambitious rock-climber who often scaled dangerous slopes with youthful abandon and at least once, in July of 1949, was stuck on a sheer ledge till it was dark, his parents waiting at the foot in a state of "controlled panic." Nabokov's biographer is certain that the story "above all . . . derived from his and [his wife's] fears for Dmitri's safety."[20] This staging, by force of imagination, of a

mortifying scenario finds a stark expression in Nabokov's wartime poem, Housmanic in tone, published in the *Atlantic* and never collected: "When he was small, when he would fall / on sand or carpet, he would lie / quite flat and still until he knew / what he would do: get up or cry. / After the battle, flat and still / upon a hillside now he lies—/ but there is nothing to decide, / for he can neither cry nor rise."

"Lance" is a giddy composition which in its central part places the spectator beside Lance's parents on their balcony suspended inside the immense starry night, while Lance is in pursuit of his breath-taking goal. His exploit is shown both in terms of mountain climbing and Arthurian romances (his father is a mediaevalist), the two modes of narration fading in and out of one another. The scope and depth of view change by turns from a field-glass survey of the cragged landscape of "The Planet" to dizzying kaleidoscopic stargazing, as the Bokes "watch," through the film of tears and imagination, their son's interstellar ascent that every now and then slips into a mediaeval knight's travail. All resources of Nabokov's stylistic orchestration come to play here; every element is magnetized for coordination and concinnity with the rest to form force-lines of parallel themes. This is one reason why Nabokov abhorred editing in principle; this is why he protested so fiercely when *The New Yorker* suggested several changes. For example, when they questioned the word "liriodendron" as a flaunting mannerism of his "excessive style," the flustered author explained that the word was geared with a series of important images (driving rain, dripping tree, skidding of the hooves) by all its alliterative cogs and therefore was absolutely irreplaceable and "as important as the whole thing is."[21] In a letter to Edmund Wilson (who grossly misunderstood Nabokov's motives in installing him, along with Katharine White, in "Lance" and refused to read it for that reason), Nabokov admits that he had put in that story "the equivalent of a dozen distant thunderstorms in nervous energy" (*NWL* 270). "Lance" contains many vestiges of that intensity, some still unheeded. It is curious to realize, for instance, that in it Nabokov had imagined, with the remarkable accuracy of artistic clairvoyance, the view of the earth from space a whole decade before man actually saw it ("dust, scattered reflections, haze, and all kinds of optical pitfalls").[22] And one is always tempted to ponder who the old elevator man at the story's end would turn out to be if he turned around to face us.

Nabokov often included "Mademoiselle O." (1936) in his short story collections, but this story was originally written in French, and although its English version went through several important revisions before and after becoming chapter 5 of *Conclusive Evidence*, it should not perhaps be counted within Nabokov's English canon.[23]

Three stories remained unfinished: in winter of 1951 Nabokov jotted down more or less detailed plans for "Three Tenses" (later used in *Transparent Things*) and "The Assistant Professor Who Was Never Found Out" (this went

in part to *Pnin*'s Chapter 6). And he eventually abandoned work on "The Admirable Anglewing" (1958–59).[24]

The corpus of Nabokov's short stories, Russian or English, has never been brought to critical study as such. Collections fared scarcely better: *Nine Stories* (1947) was ignored; *Nabokov's Dozen* (1958) received many praising reviews, all of them either brief or shallow, and often both. Things began to change only very recently, with the appearance of the comprehensive biography by Brian Boyd who discusses, at varying length, a great many Russian and all English stories, and of the volume of articles devoted specially to Nabokov's short fiction[25] in which the following English stories fall under study: "Time and Ebb" (Grossmith), "The Assistant Producer" (Nicol), "Signs and Symbols" (Toker), "Lance" (Howell), and "Double Monster" (Sweeney). Rich information on the stories' narrative technique, particularly with regard to "A Forgotten Poet," can be found in Tammi, 1985. Three important articles on "Signs and Symbols" should be mentioned in addition to the above: William Carroll, Rosenzweig, and Richter.

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NOTES

1. Parker, 1991, p. 69.
2. For a comprehensive study of Nabokov's narratology, see Tammi, 1985.
3. *Nabokov's Dozen*, p. 214.
4. Kostikov, 1990, pp. 350–404.
5. Besides the original publication in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the entire ending appears also in *Nine Stories*.
6. See a lucid hint at the end of Section 5. Kostikov inserts (after p. 224) a photograph of a Father Leonid Rozanov, sitting in front of a group of White officers, Skoblin including, and looking "straight ahead."
7. For more on this "worldly priest" see Appel, 1974, pp. 288–94, and Nicol, 1992.
8. Boyd, 1991, p. 62.
9. Ibid., p. 189.
10. Preserved in the Edmund Wilson Archive (Yale University).
11. See, for instance, Nabokov's letter to Zenzinov of March 17, 1945, cited in Boyd, 1991, pp. 84–5.
12. See esp. William Carroll, pp. 203–17; Rosenzweig, pp. 255–60; Richter, pp. 418–30; Boyd, 1991, pp. 117–19; Toker, 1993, pp. 167–80.
13. Boyd, 1991, p. 117.
14. See Toker, 1993, p. 171.
15. See Meyer, 1988, p. 184. The fact that the old lady patiently explains to the girl her exact error makes the third ring much less likely to be the third misdial in a row—see more on this line of reasoning in Toker, 1993.
16. Boyd, 1991, p. 119
17. Beginning with *Nabokov's Quartet*. At its first appearance in *The Encounter* (3, 1959), he resorted to a vicarious hint: in the "Authors" section, one could read that the

magazine's "attention has been called to the fact that puzzle-minded *Encounter* readers may be interested in looking for a coded message that occurs on the last page of the story." Among the first five winners of the one-guinea prize at least one had a name that sounded oddly like that of one of the story's mediums.

18. Boyd, 1991, p. 194.
19. A seven-years-younger Lance Boke will be made a classmate and friend of Victor Wind's in *Pnin*.
20. Boyd, 1991, p. 207. This has been first noted in Nicol, 1987.
21. Boyd, 1991, p. 209.
22. First observed in Nicol, 1987.
23. The history of the text is best described in John Foster, 1993.
24. See Boyd, 1991, p. 379, for a summary.
25. Nicol and Barabtarlo, 1993.

EUGENE ONEGIN

Strange as it may seem, no other book by Nabokov, with the exception of *Lolita*, has caused such a row as his most sedate, most scholarly and time-consuming project—the annotated translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, the gem and pride of Russian literature. Nabokov's chosen mode of translation, in which he sacrificed everything to his ideal of literalism—"every formal element . . . elegance, euphony, clarity, good taste, modern usage, and even grammar" (I, x)[1]; the elephantine size and often unscholarly, playful tone of his commentary—a bizarre mixture of wonderful insights and redundant pedantry, of ingenious argumentation and opinionated judgments, of meticulous research and idiosyncratic fictions; the heated, sometimes vicious controversy after its first publication in 1964 with a spectacular exchange of punches and counterpunches between the author and his longtime friend Edmund Wilson[2]—all this enhanced Nabokov's reputation as a haughty aristocratic elitist who would go to any lengths to express his aversion and contempt for the "average reader," even at the expense of Pushkin.

Because of his *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov is usually seen as the most belligerent advocate of the highly unpopular theory of literal translation, and is treated accordingly. George Steiner, for instance, argued that Nabokov's philosophy of language is based on a view he termed "monadist," which denies or belittles the importance of the universal language structures common to all men and "leads logically to the belief that real translation is impossible."[3] For Nabokov, he wrote, "all but the most rudimentary of interlinear translation [is] a fraud"; he thus wholeheartedly repeated the judgment of Alexander Gerschenkron: "Nabokov's translation can and indeed should be studied, but despite all the cleverness and occasional brilliance it cannot be read."[4]

Nabokov did himself a great disservice by his blunt attacks against all the types and principles of translation except the ones he found suitable at the time. In the Introduction and Commentary to *Eugene Onegin*, as well as in numerous articles and letters on the subject,[5] he not only chastised his inept and ignorant predecessors for their inadequate knowledge of Russian, wobbly English, "monumental howlers" and "incredible mistakes," but also condemned without any reservations the very idea of a poetic translation that imitates the form and structure of the original (which means that he also committed the sin of generalization that he so much loathed in others). Any rhymed and equimetrical version of a poem in a foreign language, stated Nabokov, is just a paraphrase, "with omissions and additions prompted by the exigencies of form, the conventions attributed to the consumer, and the translator's ignorance"; it is therefore a tasteless surrogate "to which only twisted bits of sense stick here and there" (I, vii, ix).[6] In his view, the sole aim of the translator should be "to produce with absolute exactitude the whole text and nothing but the text," and so "the term «literal translation» is tautological, since anything but that is not truly a translation but an imitation, an adaptation, or a parody."[7]

Nabokov's dichotomy between absolute evil ("free translation") and absolute good ("literal translation"), which was inverted and used against him by most of his opponents, is hardly defensible. As Thomas Shaw pointed out in his gentle reproof to Nabokov, "each of these basic types of translation has its own function and service. One type gives up literal accuracy in order to convey the general aesthetic impression of the original: to suggest the music, the verse pattern, the tone and style. The other gives up the aesthetic effect of the stanza-form in order to make it possible for the reader to obtain precise *understanding*; the aesthetic impression of the verse units will be either lost, or it must be conveyed by other means. The first of these types is ordinarily for the general reader; the second, for the serious reader and critic, the specialist, the scholar. Each has its place."[8] Intercourse with a different culture is a twofold process involving both the recognition of commonality and the appreciation of dissimilarity, both empathy with the familiar and interest in the alien. "Free translation" tends to domesticate a foreign text and thus makes the initial contact with it possible by lessening the gap between cultures; "literal translation," on the contrary, tends to defamiliarize its object and thus helps the reader to understand an alien culture on its own terms and to avoid facile self-projection.[9] Both are necessary for intercultural communication, and it is only through a continuous dialogue between competing—never perfect—versions that a literary masterpiece is really appropriated by another culture. If Nabokov approved of Pushkin's likening "translators to horses changed at the post houses of civilization," and wanted students to use his work "as a pony" (I, x), he ought to have admitted that the road is open in two directions—from the original to the reader and from the latter to the former—and cannot be turned into a one-way street.

However, the literary theories of writers and poets (and of Nabokov in particular), should always be taken, to quote the Commentary to *Eugene Onegin*, "with a lick of salt" (II, 119). Far from presenting a coherent and systematic view of the subject, they frequently elucidate and explain only a single phenomenon—namely, the work of the author in question—and serve mostly as a means of self-justification and self-support. Just a glance at Nabokov's half a century-long record as a translator of poetry—from the Russian versions of Shakespeare, Rupert Brooke, Yeats, Tennyson, Rimbaud, and Musset up to the English ones of Pushkin, Tiutchev, Lermontov[10] and, last but not least, Sirin[11]—shows beyond any doubt that his practice, with the sole exception of *Eugene Onegin*, has contradicted his proclaimed (or feigned?) principles. Together with the hero of *The Gift* he believed that "since there were things [one] wanted to express just as naturally and unrestrainedly as the lungs want to expand, hence *words suitable for breathing ought to exist*" (*Gift* 154; italics added), and this "anti-monadist" philosophy allowed him to find words, meters, and rhymes in two languages for "free translations" of either his own works or those of his favorites among Russian and English poets. It is only *Eugene Onegin* that shattered Nabokov's belief in universal translatability and caused him to try a new approach to the reality of Pushkin's great novel in verse.[12]

It seems that Nabokov's initial attempts to translate some fragments of *Eugene Onegin* in a traditional, "free" manner—with the retention of the rhymes and metrical pattern[13]—had convinced him that his usual method for once was doomed to failure. The very intricacy of the so called "Onegin stanza" (which consists of fourteen lines in iambic tetrameter, with a regular rhyming scheme) and the sheer length of the text put too many constraints upon a translator who cannot help curtailing or padding the original lines in order to reproduce the design and thereby mutilating Pushkin's harmonious interplay of sense and sound. Moreover, the differences in prosody, in the general stock of rhymes and, what is even more important, in associative aurae of corresponding forms and meters between Russian and English poetry are so great that *any* rhymed and equimetrical translation of *Eugene Onegin*, whether relatively close to the original or full of howlers and distortions, would be perceived automatically as a monotonous series of loosely connected jingles—at best, an antiquated narrative poem in the vein of Byron's *Beppo* and *Don Juan*. Everyone who has tried to teach *Eugene Onegin* in rhymed translations knows all too well that they make it a futile enterprise to convince even the most gullible students that Pushkin, to quote Edmund Wilson, "is the only modern poet in the class of Shakespeare and Dante."[14]

Since "free translations" of Pushkin's greatest work inadvertently albeit inevitably reduce him to a lesser Byron, their impact upon the English-speaking world has been mostly detrimental to the reception of Russian literature as a whole. They were partly responsible for the negligence of the Pushkinian, "Apollonian" strain in the Russian literary tradition and, hence,

for the one-sided, biased assumptions about it that became prevalent in the West in the 1940s and 1950s when Nabokov had to teach Russian literature in American universities. He was obviously exasperated at the current "Dostoevskycentric" view of Russian writers as homegrown proto-existentialists—exclusively "Dionysian" soul-searchers and mystagogues, and tried to correct the bias by his thundering, though completely ineffectual, invectives against Dostoevsky and his American worshippers. Yet, with the absence of Pushkin from the Western pantheon of Russian writers, it was impossible to counterbalance the deep-rooted myths and preconceptions that misrepresented the Russian literary heritage. Nabokov's *Eugene Onegin* should therefore be considered an important cultural message intended to make up for the omission and to elevate Pushkin to the status of a universal genius. In this sense the very format of the presentation conveyed its meaning, for it is only the accepted classics that are traditionally honored with literary translations and copious commentary.[15] Nabokov himself explained his reason for wanting to be "as true to the original as scholarship and art can make it" by the fact that "*Eugene Onegin* is as great a world classic as *Hamlet* or *Moby Dick*" (*SL* 132). Thanks to his translation this fact was at last assimilated by American culture.

In his foreword to *Eugene Onegin* Nabokov remarked that the aim of the literal translation is to render, "as closely as the associative and syntactical capacities of another language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original" (I, viii; cf. also III, 185). This definition, however, is rather vague, because Nabokov does not specify what kind of context ought to find its equivalent in translation—a single word, a syntagm, a phrase, a poetic line, a stanza, a chapter, or a text as a whole? Yet, as Mikhail Gasparov conclusively showed, "a degree of literalism" depends solely on the chosen "contextual length." "At the one pole is a translation that strives to convey the original word for word. . . . Such, for example, are translations of the Holy Writ into all languages. . . . At the other pole is a translation that strives to convey the original on the scale of the work as a whole—a complete lyric poem, say."[16]

Most of Nabokov's detractors saw in his *Eugene Onegin* a paradigmatic word-for-word translation and concentrated their criticism on his usage of English archaisms and poetisms intended to signal certain deviations from the lexical norm in the original. Almost all the reviewers made more or less sarcastic comments about such rarities as *mollitude* and *dulcitude* (for Russian "nega"), *sapajous* (for "obez'iany"), *curvate* (for "krivye"), *rememorating* (for "vospomnia"; in the revised edition changed to "having recalled"), *scrab up* (for "tsaptsarap"), and so on. Though in each case Nabokov's choice was caused by his desire to render Gallic or Old Russian overtones of *Eugene Onegin*'s diction with absolute accuracy, he often heavily overplayed the strangeness of the original word and, as a result, turned a stylistic nuance into a loud splash. As Alexander Gerschenkron pointed out in his persuasive, though not wholly impartial review of *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov tended to ignore the process of Russification, started long before Pushkin, "in the course of which the values

and connotations of [Gallic] words and phrases were subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, changed, and the feeling for their foreign origin was lost." Thus, the word "nega," originally formed after a French model, "had become, by Pushkin's time, a common and rather lightweight coin in Russian literary language; morphologically it was well supported by a very simple adjective ['nezhnyi,' that is 'tender,' 'gentle'], and Nabokov's renditions of it as *mollitude* (via the French *mollesse*) or *dulcitude*, ingenious as they may be, are infinitely heavier and farther away from ordinary language than is the Russian original."[17] The utopian search for lexical absolutes led Nabokov away from the historical and artistic reality of Pushkin's novel to abstracting pseudo equivalents of separate words that could tell more about their etymology, or even, as is the case with *sapajous*, their possible French duplicates than about "the exact contextual meaning of the original."

Fortunately for the translation, however, its predominant "contextual length" is not a single word, but rather a *poetic line*. That is why Nabokov in the foreword to the second, revised edition of *Eugene Onegin* remarked that the main task of his corrections was "to achieve a closer *line-by-line* fit (entailing a rigorous coincidence of enjambments and the elimination of verse transposal)" (I, xiii; italics added). He adhered to the principle of interlinearity even in those cases when it resulted in wrenching and twisting the English order of words. Due to composite inversions imitating Russian syntax some phrases become almost unreadable, like these, taken at random: "He who has lived and thought can't help / despising people in his soul / him who has felt disturbs / the ghost of irrecoverable days" (I, 115; chapter 1, stanza 46); "In his backwoods an eremitic sage, / the ancient *corvée*'s yoke / by the light quitrent he replaced" (I, 127; ch. 2, st. 4); "without an imperceptible trace, / to leave the world I would be sad" (I, 144; ch. 2, st. 39); "With his unlooked-for apparition, / the momentary softness of his eyes, / and odd conduct with Olga, / to the depth of her soul / she's penetrated . . ." (I, 228; ch. 6, st. 3); "In the ache of the heart's remorse, / his hand squeezing the pistol, / at Lenski Eugene looks" (I, 243; ch. 6, st. 35); "And now, on rounds of family dinners / Tanya they trundle daily / to grandsires and to grandams to present / her abstract indolence" (I, 271; ch. 7, st. 44); "and, near him having noticed her, / about her, straightening his wig, / seeks information an old man" (I, 274; ch. 7, st. 49); "And he her heart had agitated! / About him in the gloom of night, / as long as Morpheus had not flown down, / time was, she virginally brooded" (I, 295; ch. 8, st. 28).

Citing the latter example in his brilliant discussion of *Eugene Onegin*, Brian Boyd convincingly argues that the main reason for such awkward turns is Nabokov's "insistence on challenging his readers to consult and confront Pushkin. By refusing to offer smooth, self-sufficient English, he can issue a constant line-by-line reminder to students—or to the general readers who he hoped might be 'moved to learn Pushkin's language'—that they must keep returning to the Russian."[18] Since the literal translation by its very nature serves as a kind of companion to the original and presupposes that its readers

should have (or will acquire) some knowledge of the foreign language, Nabokov's *Eugene Onegin*, concludes Boyd, "distorts English deliberately and transparently. Deliberately, to remind us that this English has no independent life of its own, and has value only when placed alongside Pushkin's Russian. And transparently, because when his words take up their natural place under their Russian counterparts . . . they suddenly allow us to see through to Pushkin."[19]

Though I wholly agree with Boyd's central thesis that Nabokov intended his translation to be read alongside Pushkin's text, I do not think we should see in his deliberate distortions solely a self-sacrificing invitation to the original—a useful supporting crib, or, in Boyd's metaphor, translucent lenses that allow one to peer at the beauties of Russian poetry. By breaking the customary order of words and reshuffling the syntagms, Nabokov also aims at a peculiar—"defamiliarizing"—*aesthetic* effect: he tries to do away with the division of a poetic text into phrases characteristic of the English tradition, and instead shifts the emphasis to a single line to be scanned and perceived as a unit of poetic utterance—in Tynianov's terminology a "dense poetic row" within which words, yoked together by sound-play and meter, change or modify their meanings. The translation now and then plays on the jarring contrast between the awkward syntax or word usage and tightness of a rhythmical, euphonic poetic line, and it is thanks to this device that, to quote Anthony Burgess, "we have the feeling throughout of a literary experience . . . a new poetic *frisson*, as though Russian were fertilizing English."[20] When, for instance, Nabokov translates a most powerful Pushkin stanza in which Lenski's death is described by "the rich and original metaphor of the deserted house, closed inner shutters, whitened window-panes, [and] departed female owner (the soul being feminine in Russian)" (III, 53), one can easily take issue with his choice of the archaic "chatelaine" for the simple Russian "khoziaika," and "God wot" for "Bog vest'": ". . . now, as in a deserted house, / all in it is both still and dark, / it has become forever silent. / The window boards are shut. The panes with chalk / are whitened over. The chatelaine is gone. / But where, God wot. All trace is lost" (I, 242; ch. 6, st. 32). Yet, "chateLAINE" together with "whitENed" and "gONe" forms a perfect alliterative pattern and contains, exactly like the Russian "zabeLENy," the first syllable of Lenski's name; similarly, "WOt" mirrors the stressed vowels in "GOd" and "lOst" (cf. Russian "gdE" / "vEst'" / "slEd") and, coupled with "Where" of the first foot, supports the parallelism in three consecutive lines: Window-Whitened-Where (cf. the Russian sequence: "ZAmolklo" / "ZAkryty" / "ZAbeleny" / "KhoZIAiki"). In this way the translation not only faithfully reproduces the meaning of each line but, in addition, retains a vestige of Pushkin's intricate sound-play and thus creates a poetic image of the original, which can be appreciated even in its own right.

If we take a closer look at the fragment quoted above, we'll see that in four lines out of six Nabokov managed to preserve Pushkin's iambic tetrameter:

now, as in a deserted house,	Teper', kak v dome opustelom,
all in it is both still and dark,	Vse v nem i tikho i temno;
it has become forever silent. [. . .]	Zamolklo navsegda ono. [. . .]
But where, God wot. All trace is lost.	A gde, Bog vest'. Propal i sled.

Throughout the translation he tries to keep as close as possible to blank iambs, varying only the length of the line—from iambic dimeter to iambic pentameter. This self-imposed constraint is atypical and unnecessary for a literal rendering and has puzzled some of his critics. "There is little doubt that Nabokov's 'ideal of literalism' would have been better served by a straightforward prose translation," reasoned Alexander Gerschenkron, who pointed out that adherence to the meter entailed certain sacrifices of "nuances and intonations": "Only because of the meter the very Russian fur coats have been converted into French 'pelisses,' 'curses' become 'imprecations,' and old peasant women have acquired the vocabulary of college students. It is, therefore, difficult to accept Nabokov's assertion that 'the retention [of the meter] assisted rather than hindered fidelity' (I, x). It is not clear at all why Nabokov persisted in retaining the meter, and at times only the semblance thereof, since he has shown quite convincingly in his 'Notes on Prosody' that the iambic tetrameters in Russian and in English are far from being equivalent and accordingly serve different purposes and produce a different impact upon the reader."[21] Nothing could be said against Gerschenkron's devastating arguments provided we take all of Nabokov's "theories" at face value and, like Boyd, regard his *Eugene Onegin* as an educational instrument for reading and understanding Pushkin's poetry. But the very fact of Nabokov's desire to sacrifice exact meaning for the sake of rhythm, which contradicts his own rigorous pronouncements, proves that he was ruled not only by pedagogical concerns and strove to invest his "crib" with some poetic qualities. In his Russian "Notes of a Translator," he remarked that he combined iambic lines of different length as "an element of melody," which substitutes for the euphonic variety of the original,[22] and it is the whimsical melodic line created by constant fluctuations of rhythm—now attenuated, now expanded—that quickens the slovenly text and somehow holds it together.

It seems that the *raisons d'être* for Nabokov's obstinate preoccupation with meter are the lines rendering both the meaning and the rhythm of the original with uncanny fidelity—those mirror-images of Pushkin's tetrameters, which mutilate neither Russian nor English sense and sound. In each stanza of his *Eugene Onegin* one can find at least two perfect iambic clones, such as these from chapter 1, stanzas 1–4:

and nothing better could invent	I luchshe vydumat' ne mog
the half-alive one to amuse	Poluzhivogo zabavliat'
with posters flying in the dust	Letia v pyli na pochtovykh

was born upon the Neva's banks	Rodilsia na bregakh Nevy
but harmful is the North to me	No vreden sever dlia menia
Having served excellently, nobly,	Sluzhiv otlichno blagorodno,
his father lived by means of debt	Dolgami zhil ego otets
and squandered everything at last	I promotalsia nakonets
at first, Madame looked after him	Sperva *Madam* za nim khodila
The child was boisterous but nice	Rebenok byl rezov, no mil
Would teach him everything in play	Uchil ego vsemu shutia
Scolded him slightly for his pranks	Slegka za shalosti branil
Monsieur was ousted from the place	*Monsieur* prognali so dvora
and finally he saw the World	I nakonets uvidel svet
All of us had a bit of schooling	My vse uchilis' ponemnogu
hence education, God be praised	Tak vospitan'em, slava Bogu
is in our midst not hard to flaunt	U nas nemudreno blesnut'
without constraint, in conversation	Bez prinuzhden'ia v razgovore
keep silent in a grave discussion	Khranit' molchan'e v vazhnom spore

For the bilingual reader who knows her or his *Evgeny Onegin*, such equimetrical marvels—the repeated flashes of Pushkinian harmony amidst the tangle of discords—serve as mnemonics that immediately bring to mind the terse, aphoristic lines of the original. They stick out of the surrounding jumble like the actual fragments of the virtual ideal translation never to be attained, and turn all the adjacent lines into rough dummies replacing by necessity their real, untranslatable models. But the novice in the realm of Russian language and literature also can catch a glimpse of Pushkin's art through these chinks in the wall of the clumsy English and imagine the beauty of the original hidden behind impervious language barriers. It is interesting that Nabokov's tetrameters are usually distinguished by greater clarity of expression, more or less normal syntax, and lack of lexical monstrosities as if in them the reality of Pushkin has triumphed over a resisting foreign medium and proved its compatibility with the English poetic language. The constant to-and-fro oscillations of rhythm in respect to the original reveal the pivotal ambivalent strategy of the translation—to represent *Eugene Onegin* for English readers as both the alien, unfamiliar, uniquely Russian phenomenon that cannot be fully appropriated by the foreign language and, at the same time, as an integral part of the overall West European poetic sensibility that shares certain common traits with its English counterparts and, therefore, becomes *partially translatable.*

The same double-edged strategy underlies Nabokov's copious commentary to the text in which he, on the one hand, gives detailed glosses on peculiarly Russian idioms, concepts, customs, names, historical and cultural facts unfamiliar to the Western reader, but, on the other, never misses a chance to provide an English parallel to Pushkin's turn of phrase, motif, or image, even if it can be found in a poem or a book written long after *Eugene Onegin* (see, for example, II, 46, 96, and III, 53). Since, in his view, the landscape and the

characters of the novel "were borrowed from books," mostly French or English and German ones in French translations, but "brilliantly recomposed by a great poet to whom life and library were one" (II, 151), Nabokov focuses mainly on the search for Pushkin's West European literary sources, and his numerous discoveries remain unrivaled in the field. For instance, he was the first to identify many reminiscences, quotations, and clichés of eighteenth-century French poetry missed by his predecessors; he read attentively all the texts mentioned or alluded to by Pushkin, and his witty, very amusing synopses of the long-forgotten novels and plays elucidate their connections with *Eugene Onegin*; he studied French prose translations of Byron and proved beyond any doubt that Pushkin owed much more to these "mediators" than to the English originals.[23] If it were not for Nabokov sporadically flaunting his awesome erudition for its own sake and pouring out irrelevant curiosities upon the reader[24] (a symptomatic trait of neophytes to the art of annotation, who always grudge every note they make), the West European part of his commentary could be acclaimed as an exemplary piece of scholarship.

Unfortunately, Nabokov was not so attentive and persistent in his search for Pushkin's Russian sources, parallels, and subtexts. His discussion of the subject mostly repeats or develops the observations made earlier by Russian and Soviet scholars (often without proper acknowledgments). Collating his notes and the most recent commentary to *Eugene Onegin* by Iury Lotman[25] is enough to show that in many instances Nabokov misses or ignores Pushkin's important allusions to Batiushkov, Baratynsky, Derzhavin, Kiukhel'beker, Viazemsky, Voeikov, and other Russian writers. Yet it should be remembered that Nabokov was writing his commentary for American readers who needed the basics of Russian culture and literature rather than analyses of intertextual subtleties. He had to furnish necessary information about Pushkin's biography, local color, the main historical events and figures, the morals and manners of the time, and his longest notes fulfill exactly this educational purpose. Hostile to historicism in any form (there is a great difference, he asserts, "between the reality of art and the unreality of history" [III, 177]), Nabokov prefers to characterize the background of *Eugene Onegin* not via systematic discourse but by an illustrative anecdote or an essayistic digression like the one on duels (III, 43–50). Especially illuminating are his elegant, crisp sketches of Pushkin's crowd—the famous hussar Kaverin who "was able to stow away at one meal four bottles of champagne" (II, 72); Piotr Chaadaev, "fop and philosopher, a man of mercy and wit" (II, 104); the spectacular Raevsky family (II, 120–125); Baratynsky, a poet "regarded by Pushkin with a tender and grave respect" (II, 380); unlucky Kiukhel'beker, "one of Schiller's victims, a brave idealist, a heroic Decembrist, a pathetic figure" (II, 446); the Osipov women (II, 534–536); Baron Anton Del'vig, "one of Pushkin's dearest friends, a minor poet" who "curiously combined the classical strain and the folksy one, the amphora and the samovar," and "by a marvelous coincidence . . . died on the anniversary of the death of the fictional Lenski" (III, 23), and many others—

that, together with descriptions and translated fragments of numerous Russian poems and novels, skillfully recreate the atmosphere of the Pushkinian "Golden Age."

It is against this picturesque (though somewhat patchy and impressionistic) background that Nabokov carries on his very close reading of the text. He discusses the meanings and connotations of each polysemous word or phrase and explains his choice of equivalents; he dwells on all the significant minutiae of style and description—on parodic twist and folkish idiom, on semiotics of gesture and dress; he reconstructs the chronology of action; he analyses rhymes and alliterations; he follows the interplay of motifs and presents a seminal summary of the novel's plot and structure. Without access to Pushkin's manuscripts, solely on the basis of published drafts and variants, Nabokov even managed to suggest a few plausible solutions to certain textological puzzles that have been accepted by leading authorities in the field. Though some of his readings may be (and, in fact, have been) disputed, the Commentary does ease one's way into the world of *Eugene Onegin* and helps to understand its intricate artistic design.

The role of an impartial erudite-annotator, a book-worm totally committed to his venerated object, was, however, too humble and inconspicuous for Nabokov's artistic temperament. "Scholarship without humility or humor is a basic type of pedantry" (II, 46), he gibed at his rivals; but if his own work sparkles with humor and wit, humility is definitely not one of its virtues. Now and then the authorial persona of the commentary, not unlike the protagonist in *Pale Fire*, grows out of proportion and starts to supplant the reality of Pushkin and his novel by self-projections and "strong opinions." Nabokov may invent a groundless story about Pushkin's duel with Ryleev at Batovo, the latter's estate, with the sole purpose of feigning a connection between his own biography and that of Pushkin, and in order to "rememorate" the mock duels he fought with his cousin "in the *grand allée* of Batovo," which then belonged to his grandparents (II, 431–434). Similarly, he may use *Eugene Onegin* as a pretext for mentioning an opera composed by his ancestor Karl Heinrich Graun (II, 79) or for referring to his "rather frivolous little book" on Gogol (II, 314). The commentary gives vent to Nabokov's idiosyncratic scorn and loathing for many writers and their works: "insipid Virgil and his pale pederasts" (II, 55), Corneille's "bombastic and platitudinous *Cid*" (II, 83), Voltaire's "abominably pedestrian verses" (II,147), Rousseau's "total trash" (II, 338), "a queer strain of triviality" in Goethe's *Faust* (II, 236), Stendhal's "much overrated *Le Rouge et le noir*" (II, 90), "popular but essentially mediocre" Balzac and Sainte-Beuve (II, 354), Karamzin's "prim and pallid fiction" (III, 143), Baratynsky's "tasteless" *The Ball* (III, 176), and, of course, Fedor Dostoevsky, "a much overrated, sentimental, and Gothic novelist of the time, . . . one of those megaphones of elephantine platitudes," damned together with all the other "plaster idols of academic tradition, from Cervantes to George Eliot (not

to speak of the crumbling Manns and Faulkners of our times)" (III, 191–192). Reluctant to suggest a coherent framework for interpreting *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov chooses instead to make fun of widespread critical stereotypes trivializing Pushkin's novel, particularly the vulgar Soviet style ones, but he does not offer much in response to them besides his just and devastating polemical ire. He tries to read Pushkin in terms of his own aesthetic principles, and any scholar of Nabokov will find in the Commentary many illuminating statements indispensable for a deeper understanding of *his*—not Pushkin's—artistic consciousness that cannot help reflecting itself even when it is directed outward.

It seems that Nabokov intended his Commentary to mimic the structure of *Eugene Onegin*, which, in his words, builds up the character of Pushkin "by means of . . . digressions or brief interpolations—nostalgic yearnings, sensuous enchantments, bitter memories, professional remarks, and genial banter" (II, 170). Each genre, however, dictates its own rules and what is appropriate in the fictitious reality of a novel or the personal discourse of an essay may look preposterous and vain in the austere frame of scholarly exegesis. Defending Nabokov's "image of himself as the very deliberate champion of the particular and individual," Brian Boyd extols his presenting the Commentary to *Eugene Onegin* "as an exemplum of what can be accomplished by direct individual effort rather than reliance on secondhand knowledge."[26] Alas, the very notion of an "individual commentary" is no less utopian than that of a "perfect translation." Any annotated edition of a well-studied classical text like Pushkin's novel cannot but rely heavily on accumulated scholarship, cannot be anything but, for the most part, a compilation of previous findings, and thus would never become a wholly original work. Nabokov's *Eugene Onegin* is not an exception to this rule, though he would refuse to admit it. Using every opportunity to trample on his predecessors for both an unpardonable howler and a trifling misprint, he seldom avows his indebtedness to them or pays tribute to their real achievements. Yet even "the incredible Brodsky"—the servile Stalinist whose moronic misinterpretations of Pushkin are Nabokov's prime laughing stock—in his Commentary to *Eugene Onegin* cites much objective information that Nabokov quietly borrows. Accustomed to dictatorial power over his fictional worlds, he evidently tried to gain the same supreme authority in respect to Pushkin's masterpiece and, by implication, to assert himself as his sole exegete and peer. But, as it always happens, the unattainable goal subverted the means, and his Commentary lost the cogency of objective scholarship, turning instead into just another statement of the "My Pushkin" type, on a par with essentially analogous (though much less ambitious and labor-consuming) declarations by Valery Briusov, Marina Tsvetaeva, and their followers[27]—a kinship that Nabokov would hardly approve. "I shall be remembered by *Lolita* and my work on *Eugene Onegin*" (*SO* 106), he said in an interview, and I think he was right. His annotated translation of *Eugene Onegin*

will always be remembered—not only as a brilliant guide to Pushkin but also as a rare example of Nabokov's half-defeat.

Alexander Dolinin

NOTES

1. All volume and page references to the revised 1975 edition of Nabokov's translation of *Eugene Onegin* will be given in the text.
2. The main documents of the Nabokov-Wilson feud are Wilson, 1965 (reprinted with corrections in Wilson, 1972, pp. 209–37) and "Nabokov's Reply" (*Encounter*, February 1966, pp. 80–89) reprinted as "Reply to My Critics" in *SO* 241–67 and elsewhere. For a discussion of the controversy, in which, I think, both participants showed their worst, see Boyd, 1991, pp. 492–99.
3. Steiner, 1975, p. 77.
4. Ibid., p. 332, n. 1; Gerschenkron, p. 340. For criticism of Nabokov's translation theory, see also Robinson, pp. 242–47 and Leighton, 180–82.
5. See, for example, Nabokov's "Problems of Translation," "Zametki perevodchika," "The Servile Path," *SO* (passim).
6. There are reasons to believe that the implied target of Nabokov's fierce polemics could be his arch-rival Boris Pasternak, whose famous translations of Shakespeare published in the 1940s and 1950s were, in Nabokov's terms, "arty paraphrases." Cf. a thinly disguised attack on Pasternak's translations in the foreword to *Invitation to a Beheading*: "*Vive le pédant,* and down with the simpletons who think that all is well if the 'spirit' is rendered (while the words go away by themselves on a naive and vulgar spree—in the suburbs of Moscow for instance—and Shakespeare is again reduced to play the king's ghost)" (*IB* 7).
7. Nabokov, "Problems of Translation," p. 504. Cf. Nabokov's earlier statement that "the expression 'a literal translation' is more or less nonsense" ("The Art of Translation," p. 162)
8. Shaw, 1965, pp. 112–13.
9. I follow here the line of argument suggested in Mikhail Gasparov's brilliant essay on Briusov's literal translation of *The Aeneid*. See Gasparov, 1971, pp. 106–13.
10. See Nabokov, *Three Russian Poets*.
11. See *PP*. The contradiction between Nabokov's rigorous theories and his own practice has been discussed in Grayson, pp. 14–22.
12. Cf. Nabokov's answer to a question concerning the reasons for his absorption with *Eugene Onegin*: ". . . it was again the combination of the excitement of finding the right way of doing things and a certain approach to reality, to the reality of Pushkin" (*SO* 13).
13. See Nabokov, "Pushkin: rhymed paraphrases. . . ." Later Nabokov will disown these "lame paraphrases of Pushkin's text" (postscript to W. Arndt's article "Goading the Pony," *The New York Review of Books*, 30 April 1964, p. 16).
14. Wilson, 1972, p. 18.
15. Cf., for example, Robert Browning's literal version of *Agamemnon* and Chateaubriand's *Paradise Lost*—in Nabokov's view "a marvelous prose translation" (III, 31).

16. Gasparov, 1971, p. 101. I use Lauren Leighton's translation of the passage in Leighton, p. 200.
17. Gerschenkron, p. 338. For astute criticism of Nabokov's notorious word-for-word renditions, see also Boyd, 1991, pp. 330–33.
18. Boyd, 1991, pp. 334–35.
19. Ibid., p. 336.
20. Burgess, 1965, p. 76.
21. Gerschenkron, p. 339. In the second edition of *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov, obviously in response to Gerschenkron's criticism, deleted the statement quoted by the latter and claimed instead that he had "sacrificed to completeness of meaning every formal element *including the iambic rhythm, whenever its retention hindered fidelity*" (I, x; italics added). In fact, however, many of his revisions, as my student Jennifer J. Ryan convincingly showed in her unpublished paper, reinstate or strengthen the iambic meter rather than suppress it. Cf. her examples (I, 109–110; ch. 1, stanzas 32 and 34):

1964 version:	1975 version:
something about it makes more charming the small foot of Terpsichore.	However, the little foot of Terpsichore is for me in some way more charming.
with token beauty it attracts the willful swarm of desires.	with token beauty it attracts the willful swarm of longings.
I like it, dear Elvina the words and gaze of the said charmers	I'm fond of it, my friend Elvina the words and gaze of these bewitchers

22. Nabokov, "Zametki perevodchika," p. 130.
23. It should be noted, however, that Nabokov erroneously underrated Pushkin's knowledge of English in the end of the 1820s and blundered in attributing his *Pir vo vremia chumy* (*Feast in Time of Plague*) to a non-existent "French literal translation of a scene from John Wilson's *The City of the Plague*" (III, 180). In fact, Pushkin read Wilson in English using his own copy of *The Poetical Works of Milman, Bowles, Wilson, and Barry Cornwall* (Paris: Galignani, 1829). Brian Boyd discusses "Nabokov's irrationally unconditional denial that Pushkin could encounter English verse in the original" and explains it by his wish "at all costs to oppose his own determination to encounter great literature in the original and Pushkin's readiness to accept it at second hand" (Boyd, 1991, pp. 350–52).
24. Just one illustrative example—the commentary on ch. 2, st. 5—will, I think, suffice. When snubbed by Onegin, his neighbors start abusing him and, among other things, talk about his habit of drinking only red wine by tumblers: ". . . on p'et odno / stakanom krasnoe vino" (according to Iury Lotman, the hint is at Onegin's extravagance: he spends money on expensive imported wines while the locals drink homemade liqueur). In his gloss on the line Nabokov suggests an absolutely implausible reading of "odno" [only] as "straight" or "unwatered," which he immediately rejects, but nevertheless uses this conjecture as an excuse for his brief review of Pushkin's and Byron's drinking habits, finishing with the following nice touch: "According to a remark of Wellington's (1821) reported by Samuel Rogers in his *Recollections* (1856) Louis XVIII mixed water with his champagne" (II, 227). It may be very amusing, but

neither Samuel Rogers, nor Wellington, nor even the King of France has any bearing on the meaning of Pushkin's line.

25. See Lotman, 1983.
26. Boyd, 1991, p. 348.
27. On the tradition of "My Pushkin" statements in Russian culture of the twentieth century going back to the Silver Age, see Paperno, Pushkin v zhizni.

THE EYE

The Eye, first published in 1930 as *Sogliadatai* (*The Spy* or *The Reconnoiterer*), was Nabokov's fourth novel. Physically slight, the psychological mystery tale aroused only modest interest among critics either on its first appearance or upon its English publication in 1965.

During the thirties, the Russian émigré critics Gleb Struve and Vladislav Khodasevich offered early views of *Sogliadatai*, each focusing on different themes. Struve remarked Nabokov's preoccupation with dazzling literary technique rather than humanistic concerns and emphasized the novel's theme of chance rather than determinism in human affairs.[1] Khodasevich also emphasized the author's interest in style but saw the novel's theme as the typically Nabokovian one of the failed artist.[2]

The first English reading of *The Eye* was offered by Andrew Field who followed the lead of Khodasevich in seeing the novel as an exploration of the theme of the "failed artist"—one whose imaginative gifts are not adequate to transcend a harsh reality.[3] Susan Fromberg Schaeffer, in one of the most far-ranging studies of the novel, agrees that the theme lies in the relationship between imagination and reality, but argues that the writer–protagonist is successful rather than a failure.[4] Brian Boyd concludes that not only does Smurov, the hero, fail to surmount his humiliations, but that "the terms of his failure define the human condition by contrast with a genuine beyond—which for Nabokov would be quite incompatible with Smurov's tightly tethered selfhood."[5] The most detailed study of *The Eye* is by D. Barton Johnson, who offers a close analysis of the novel's structure and style and locates it within the context of Nabokov's *oeuvre*.[6] More specialized studies focusing on other aspects of *The Eye* include Julian Connolly's investigation of its connections with Dostoevsky's *The Double*, and Johnson's examinations of other literary allusions.[7] W.W. Rowe, following the lead of Brian Boyd, has probed the presence of ghosts in *The Eye*, while Jane Grayson has studied differences between the Russian and English texts.[8] Freiwald offers a semiotic analysis of point of view in the novel.[9] The biographical background of *The Eye* may be found in the Boyd and Field biographies.[10]

The plot of *The Eye* is, as Nabokov novels go, not complex. The setting is the Russian émigré community in Berlin some seven years after the

Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. In the opening pages the narratorial "I" (the observing "eye" of the title), a nameless, morbidly self-conscious young Russian émigré, suffers a beating at the hands of a husband whose promiscuous wife has seduced the passive hero. Humiliated, the narrator shoots himself. Upon coming to, he believes himself dead. He attributes his hospital ward, and later his familiar Berlin surroundings, to residual psychic energy. Everything around him, he assumes, is but the work of his "left over" imagination. The sensitive narrator is at last invulnerable to the slights of others.

In this new world created by his imagination the narrator begins to frequent an émigré household which includes the attractive Vanya, and, among the guests, one Mukhin, who unbeknownst to the narrator, is Vanya's fiancé. On his visits, the "I"/"eye" notices another newcomer, one Smurov, who makes widely contradictory impressions on the members of the family and other guests. The emotionally detached narrator decides to amuse himself by collecting the diverse images of Smurov reflected by the other characters to determine the "real" Smurov. Most critical and most elusive is that of Vanya. As negative images of Smurov increasingly outweigh the positive, the narrator loses his vaunted objectivity. At last he approaches Vanya and, strangely, rather than seeking out her image of Smurov (as had been his intent), he hysterically proclaims his own love for her. Rebuffed, the humiliated narrator returns to the scene of his "suicide" to reassure himself of his invulnerable, ghostly state. Finding the bullet hole in the wall, he leaves reassured, but as he walks along, he encounters his erstwhile attacker who hails him as "Mr. Smurov." The reader's suspicions are confirmed: the narratorial "eye" is not only alive but is identical with the mysterious Smurov. The husband, having belatedly learned of his ex-wife's many dalliances, wishes to make handsome amends. Although losing Vanya, Smurov stands at the beginning of a new life which he commences by writing the narrative we are reading. Despite the re-integration of his identity and the re-ascendancy of reality in his life, Smurov ends his account with a plangent affirmation of the superiority of imagination over reality.

The Eye represents a considerable technical achievement. Structurally, the narrative is predicated on the illusion that the narratorial "I" and Smurov are different people, while at the same time providing tantalizing but inconclusive hints that they are identical. It is a difficult technical feat since Smurov and the narrator, the eyewitness, are both seemingly present in several scenes. The real mystery of *The Eye* is not the relationship of the narrator and Smurov but Nabokov's juggling trick: how to create and maintain the illusion that the narratorial "I" and Smurov are separate characters until the moment of their coalescence. The solution is classically simple: "Mirrors." In his "Foreword," Nabokov describes the theme of *The Eye* as "the pursuit of an investigation which leads the protagonist through a hell of mirrors and ends in the merging of twin images." Nabokov presumably has these same mirrors in view when he speaks of his pleasure in "adjusting in a certain mysterious pattern the various

phases of the narrator's quest." The mirrors that Nabokov adjusts and readjusts to create and sustain the illusion of his protagonist's duality are of several sorts: some are real mirrors; others are figurative, such as the images of Smurov reflected by the other characters; still others are linguistic, involving the skillful manipulation of the narrative point of view.

The first significant actual mirror image occurs when the humiliated narrator prepares to shoot himself. In the mirror he sees "A wretched, shivering, vulgar little man in a bowler hat . . ." (17). Just as the narrator's dissociation into "the eye" and Smurov is presaged in a mirror, his reintegration near the end of the story is foreshadowed by a mirror merger. As he leaves a shop he notices a reflection in a side mirror: "a young man in a derby . . . hurried toward me. That reflection and I merged into one" (97).

The primary way in which the "I" (and the reader) form their view of Smurov (whose Russian name means "shadowy" or "murky") is not through an omniscient narrator or author, but through the narrator's often faulty perception of how the other characters see Smurov. The identification of the other characters as mirrors is explicit; when the "I"'s impression of Smurov is at low ebb, he consoles himself with the thought that "all these people . . . were not live beings but only chance mirrors for Smurov" (89). The same thought lies at the core of the narrator's peroration: "For I do not exist: there exist but the thousands of mirrors that reflect me" (103).

The acutely self-conscious protagonist has attempted to escape the unfavorable regard of others by considering himself dead. Subconsciously, he creates a double, Smurov, a stranger, who lives out the "I"'s fantasies, but whose failures cannot (ostensibly) cause emotional hurt to the pseudo-ghostly narrator. The detached observing "eye" will collect the impressions of the unknown Smurov reflected by the other characters to form his own impression. The implicit assumption is that if the collected composite impression of Smurov proves positive, the "I" can merge with him, leaving behind his self-image of inadequacy. Until that successful alter ego is firmly established, however, the "I" tries to protect his own tender ego by insisting on his psychological independence from Smurov. The narrator is only intermittently successful in maintaining this psychological facade and, ultimately, he fails.

The secret mechanisms through which Nabokov manipulates his figurative mirrors to tell his story are worth remarking. In the story's opening segment the nameless narrator and Smurov are a single entity, although the reader knows only the narrator. In the final section, the reader knows that the "I" is in fact Smurov. The inner tale (in which the protagonist is split into the narratorial "I" and Smurov) is composed of a succession of scenes in which the "I" collects images of Smurov as mirrored by different characters. These characters are Nabokov's "Hell of Mirrors." The psychological distance between the observing "eye" and Smurov changes after each scene, depending upon the image of him reflected by the characters present. When the image is strongly positive (in the narrator's often jaundiced perception), the distance

between Smurov and the "I" is considerable, and the "I" remains emotionally detached; when the reflected image is perceived as more negative, the distance shrinks, and the "I," in spite of his purported invulnerability, becomes distraught. When Smurov's reflected image is wholly negative, the distance between him and the "I" collapses and only the wretched "I" remains.

Two examples suffice to illustrate the technique. The "I"'s creation "Smurov" gets off to a good start. When a pacifist woman doctor rails against the stupidity of war, "the slight, quietly self-assured" Smurov counters with talk of the musical delight of singing bullets and the supreme thrill of the cavalry charge (34). The narrating "I," observing (and misinterpreting) the reaction of the audience, infers that they see Smurov as a former daredevil White officer. Such a man must be appealing, especially to Vanya. Smurov's image suffers a catastrophic reversal when he later regales the company with his swashbuckling escape from Bolshevik guards at the Yalta train station. His heroic image collapses when Mukhin privately observes that there is no train station in Yalta. The high point of Smurov's imagined existence comes when the "I" mistakenly thinks that Smurov rather than Mukhin is Vanya's beloved. Watching Smurov, the narrator senses "a most violent desire" that the other characters vanish and "most important, that that 'I'—the cold, insistent, tireless eye—disappear" (66). When the narrator is rudely disabused of his mistake, his creation, Smurov, ceases to exist for a time. This is formally signalled by the "I"'s admission that he has stopped watching Smurov: "I grew heavy, surrendered again to the gnawing of gravity, donned anew my former flesh, as if indeed all this life around me was not the play of my imagination, but was real, and I was part of it, body and soul" (69).

The third set of mirrors is, broadly speaking, linguistic: manipulation of the narrative point of view. Point of view in *The Eye* is carefully stagemanaged to keep separate in the reader's eye the narratorial "I" and his alter ego Smurov. In general terms, the enabling mechanism is Nabokov's use of a first person "unreliable narrator." The reader sees events only from the delusional viewpoint of the narratorial "I." Nabokov skillfully maintains the illusion of the separateness of the "I" and Smurov through a series of devices. Prior to the final encounter with the repentant husband, no one ever addresses the narrator by name. Nor is it ever mentioned. Smurov is addressed by name only once and that by mistake. It will also be noted that no character speaks with the narrator in scenes where Smurov is (also) present. Pronominal usage is closely regulated. The ostensible separation of the two characters is handled adroitly, as are the occasional clues that they are but one.

The Eye's broad theme, the nature of the relationship between imagination and reality, is realized in the problematic correlation between the narrator and Smurov. More specifically, it is conveyed through and from the viewpoint of an unreliable narrator who creates and lives in his own fantasy world. Reality, however, keeps intruding, wreaking havoc with what the "I" thinks to be his imaginary world. *The Eye*'s artistry and charm lie in the fact that it is

related entirely from the internal viewpoint of the delusional world of the hero. The good reader, in addition to relishing the narrator's fantasy world, must perceive the real world that encompasses and intrudes into it.

In the end Smurov is apparently cured of his delusion. The narrator realizes that he is alive, his world is real, and that he and Smurov are one. He has not, however, come to terms with another matter—the relationship of imagination and reality. This is revealed in Smurov's peroration: "I have realized that the only happiness in this world is to observe, to spy, to watch, to scrutinize oneself and others, to be nothing but a big, slightly vitreous, somewhat bloodshot, unblinking eye. . . . What does it matter that I am a bit cheap, a bit foul, and that no one appreciates all the remarkable things about me—my fantasy, my erudition, my literary gift. . . . I am invulnerable. And what do I care if she marries another? . . . I dream of her. . . . This is love's supreme accomplishment. I am happy—yes, happy. . . . Oh, to shout it so that all of you believe me at last, you cruel, smug people . . ." (103–104). Although Smurov seems to have persuaded himself of the superiority of imagination, his shrill protestations of happiness are unconvincing. His devastation over the loss of the real Vanya far outweighs his imaginary re-creation and possession of her. Smurov's conclusion that imagination is superior to reality, although perhaps abstractly valid, is personally unsatisfactory. While imagination may not necessarily be inferior, Smurov's imagination is inadequate to the task of transmuting reality into art. Smurov is another of Nabokov's failed artist heroes.

The lasting importance of *The Eye* is not so much in itself as in its seminal position in Nabokov's *oeuvre*. *The Eye* was the first Nabokov novel based on a first-person narrator who imposes his fantasy world upon the real world. This scheme was to be further developed in *Despair* (1934), *Pale Fire* (1962), and in Nabokov's last novel *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974). Although most critics have neglected the novella, a few have noted its importance as a turning point in Nabokov's work. Nina Berberova argues that Nabokov artistically came of age in *The Eye* and that "something fundamentally changed in the caliber of his works."[11] The most significant observation that Nabokov has made about *The Eye* occurs, almost as a "throwaway" line, in a 1967 interview. The interviewer, Alfred Appel, Jr., asks: "In which of your early works do you first begin to face the possibilities . . . that reach an apotheosis in the 'involute abode' of *Pale Fire*?" Nabokov's reply: "Possibly in *The Eye*. . . ." (*SO* 74).

D. Barton Johnson

NOTES

1. Struve, 1931.
2. Khodasevich, "O Sirine," 1937; 1970.
3. Field, 1967, pp. 165–74.

4. Schaeffer, 1972.
5. Boyd, 1990, p. 349.
6. Johnson, "Eyeing Nabokov's *Eye*."
7. Connolly, "Madness and Doubling"; D.B. Johnson, "The Books Reflected in Nabokov's *Eye*"; 1986.
8. Rowe, 1981, pp. 92–96; Grayson, pp. 82–89.
9. Freiwald.
10. Boyd, 1990; Field, 1967.
11. Berberova, 1959, pp. 93–94.

THE GIFT

The Gift (*Dar*, 1937–38; 1952) is the last, the longest and probably the best of Nabokov's Russian novels. For the first time in his career Nabokov dared to focus his imagination on the character of a fellow-writer, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, a young Russian exile in Berlin who is almost as gifted as his creator (hence the title) and shares with him some childhood reminiscences, idiosyncrasies, and predilections. The novel spans a crucial three-year period in Fyodor's life (the action starts, as Nabokov himself pointed out, on April 1, 1926, and ends on June 29, 1929[1]) and describes his heroic attempts to come to grips with all the tragic losses that plague his mind and memory: the loss of his beloved father, a famous naturalist who perished in the turmoil of the Civil War on the way back from his last expedition, the loss of his homeland, and the loss of a paradisiac past. Fyodor's daily existence is drab and dreary—an alien country, poverty, vile rented lodgings, boring English and French tutorials, humiliating encounters with hated "aborigines," lonely ramblings over Berlin—but in spite of everything he learns how to say "Yes" to the world and finds happiness in love with Zina Mertz, his ideal bride, reader and Muse, and in the verbal arts that he worships and masters.

An immature, though elegant and refined poet in the beginning of the novel, Fyodor gradually moves on to his goal—to produce prose in which "thought and music are conjoined as are the folds of life in sleep" (*Gift* 71). After having published a small collection of poems "devoted to a single theme: childhood" (9), he writes poetry only occasionally and concentrates mainly on two projects in prose: an abortive biography of his father and a successful, iconoclastic *Life of Chernyshevski*, the book within the book, which occupies Chapter Four of the novel. In the end he feels that his gift has matured to the point that he is planning two more important books: a fictitious translation from "an old French sage [Delalande]" (364), whom Nabokov had already introduced as the author of the epigraph to *Invitation to a Beheading*; and, at last, his magnum opus, a huge and intricate quasi-autobiographical novel "with 'types,' love, fate, conversations, . . . [and] descriptions of nature" (349)

that is to be based on the work of destiny that Fyodor discerned in his own life—presumably *The Gift* itself.

Apart from *The Life of Chernyshevski*, *The Gift* also contains numerous other inserted texts: more than twenty poems, either in toto or in fragments, composed by the hero; some "drafts and extracts" from his abandoned work in progress on his father; a separate story about the theatrical suicide of a young decadent poet named Yasha Chernyshevski (a namesake of the famous revolutionary and a son of Fyodor's only friends in Berlin); critical reviews of Fyodor's book; dozens of "quotes" from fictitious sources, as well as parodies and pastiches mimicking various stale styles and devices of well-known Russian writers. The mosaic, collage-like structure of *The Gift* together with its extremely rich allusiveness (which foreshadows *Lolita* and *Ada*), the multi-faceted system of leitmotifs, the recurrent blending of chronotopes and "realities" (past and present, perception and dream, text and non-text, virtual and actual, and so on), make it the most complex of all of Nabokov's Russian works. No wonder then that it took Nabokov much longer than ever before to write the novel. As Brian Boyd has duly substantiated, the writer started to plan for *The Gift* in the winter of 1932/33 and completed the manuscript only five years later, in January 1938.[2]

At an early stage of his work Nabokov described his new project to the poet Vladislav Khodasevich as "monstrously difficult," partly because of the painstaking and exhausting research for the Chernyshevski chapter that he was writing in 1934. On the other hand, the project also proved to be extremely inspiring and productive. Quite a number of poems and short stories composed concurrently with *The Gift* are in some way connected with it and their origins can be traced back to it. Thus, "The Circle" ("Krug," 1934; originally published under the title "A Story")—in Nabokov's own words "a small satellite" that separated itself from the main body of the novel and started to revolve around it"[3]—not only introduces Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev's family as seen by an outsider, but also tries out the very strategy of circular structuring that would be so resourcefully used in the novel. Two stories from 1935, "Recruiting" ("Nabor") and "Torpid Smoke" ("Tiazhelyi dym"), as Julian W. Connolly has demonstrated, anticipate *The Gift* by exploiting subtle interrelations between the central creative consciousness of a hero-artist and the outside world, as well as by experimenting with abrupt shifts from first-person to impersonal narration and vice versa.[4] A harmonious dactylic triad "Ob-la-ko, o-ze-ro, bash-nia" ("cloud, lake, tower," translated as "Cloud, Castle, Lake"), which enthralls the hero of the short story of the same title (1937), seems to stem from the imagery of *The Gift*'s epiphanic Chapter Five, and resembles the metrically similar triad "nozh-ni-tsy, pla-t'e, tsve-tok" (scissors, dress, flower)—a magic combination of things glimpsed by Fyodor in a strange apartment that sets his imagination ablaze and eventually leads up to his meeting with Zina. Even a sudden spark of inspiration that caused Nabokov to break off writing *The Gift* for a while and plunge into the dream-

like world of *Invitation to a Beheading* most probably was ignited by his readings for the Chernyshevski chapter. To a certain extent, the predicament of Cincinnatus C. mimics and heightens that of Chernyshevski, turning the farcical into the tragic, and vice versa. The Delalande connection between the two novels mentioned above pinpoints their genetic kinship.

The Gift was serialized in five consecutive issues of the leading émigré journal *Sovremennye zapiski* (*Contemporary Annals*, 1937–38), but the controversial Chapter Four was conspicuously omitted. Ironically, the editorial board of the Paris journal suppressed *The Life of Chernyshevski* on grounds similar to those used in the novel by the character Vasiliev, the fictional editor of the Berlin *Gazeta*, who rejects the work: "I assumed that this was a serious work, and it turns out to be a reckless, antisocial, mischievous improvisation. . . . I only know that to lampoon a man whose works and sufferings have given sustenance to millions of Russian intellectuals is unworthy of any talent" (207). Even two decades later one of the editors of *Sovremennye zapiski*, Mark Vishniak, stood up for the odious decision of the board and censured Nabokov for failures in his artistic treatment of the venerated Chernyshevski.[5]

Contrary to all expectations, *The Gift* did not bring about anything like the significant critical response that Nabokov had counted on. It seems that both friendly and hostile critics alike were so perplexed or disturbed by the novel (which in many aspects differed from what Nabokov had done before and went counter to established views of his art) that they used the suppression of Chapter Four as an excuse for their reluctance to discuss it in detail. Even Khodasevich, who had reviewed four previous Nabokov novels, confined himself to a couple of scanty (though mostly favorable) remarks in his regular surveys of *Sovremennye zapiski* and refused to give his final judgment until the complete text had been published.[6] In private, however, he did not hide his satisfaction with Nabokov's scathing attacks in *The Gift* against their mutual literary enemies, while several other writers of the older generation gave vent to their indignation and rage. Boris Zaitsev, for example, savaged the novel and its author in his letters to Ivan Bunin, and, playing upon its title, wrote: "Your gift, unlike Sirin's, has come from God."[7] Bunin, in his turn, evidently read *The Gift* only several years later but also flew into rage and in a letter to Aldanov compared Nabokov's "monstrosities" with the moronic babble of Ippolit Kuragin in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.[8]

The critical silence surrounding *The Gift* was not broken even after the New York based Chekhov Publishing House at last published the full Russian text of the novel in 1952. Strange as it may seem, neither of the leading émigré periodicals hardly even *mentioned* the fact of the long-delayed appearance of Nabokov's major work, to say nothing of reviewing it. By that time the remains of the Russian literary establishment in the West, to cite the prominent critic Nikolai Andreev in the Paris monthly *Vozrozhdenie*, had been deeply hurt by the apparent ease of Nabokov's transformation into an American writer, a shift which was perceived as an act of cultural betrayal, an "expression of distrust"

towards Russian literature.[9] The image of Nabokov as an apostate (or as *the* apostate) was so much at odds with the preeminent significance of Russian literature in *The Gift* that critics of the 1950s could not but ignore the latter and preferred to see in it just an anachronism, a relic of the betrayed past. Due to this unfortunate concatenation of circumstances *The Gift*—the incendiary polemical text carefully planned by its author to explore, or, better, to explode the Russian literary tradition and thus to set fire to a critical debate—for the second time fell into a contextual void and was left there to burn up by itself.

The Gift finally received full-fledged critical recognition only in the sixties when it was published in an English translation revised by the writer and was thus able to enter the post-*Lolita* Nabokov canon. Still, it has never gained notice commensurable with that given to such critical pets as *Invitation to a Beheading*, *Lolita*, or *Pale Fire*. "Despite the seminal place it occupies in the author's canon," observes Pekka Tammi, "*The Gift* has turned out to be one of VN's least reviewed and studied novels."[10] Apparently intimidated by Nabokov's brusque declaration in his foreword to the novel that "its heroine is not Zina, but Russian literature," many Nabokov scholars, who are not well versed in the field, have shunned *The Gift,* leaving it almost entirely to the care of professional Slavists. However, some important critical approaches to the novel and its interpretations have been worked out and developed in scores of essays, papers, and books by scholars in the United States, France, Russia, and other countries.

The first critics of *The Gift* took their cue largely from Nabokov's own rather provocative commentary in the Foreword, which delineated the plot of the novel in terms of Fyodor's artistic evolution. Each movement of this pentamerous progression, according to Nabokov, centers on a certain text written or planned by the hero, whose passage from poetry to prose is enabled by his discovery of his real literary fathers: Pushkin and Gogol. Following in Nabokov's tracks, most critics regard *The Gift* as a *Künstlerroman*, "a portrait of the artist in the process of becoming an artist,"[11] and thus concentrate either on Fyodor's writings,[12] or on the interior rationale of his spiritual and artistic quest.[13] In this case, Fyodor is usually taken as Nabokov's surrogate, a proxy created to express authorial panaesthetic views and to denounce what he considered to be sham, art-destroying principles—mainly, the content-oriented, utilitarian doctrine of committed literature personified in the novel by the pathetic figure of its "false prophet" Nikolay Chernyshevski. Sergej Davydov was the first to interpret *The Gift* as a "dialogical novel" that challenges and refutes the basic tenet of Chernyshevski's anti-aesthetic preaching—the supremacy of life over art. If he, like most other critics, is convinced that Nabokov in his notorious chapter 4 accurately represents "the biographical and historical facts of Chernyshevski's life,"[14] David Rampton, on the contrary, tries to prove that Nabokov (whom he inadvertently identifies with Fyodor) maliciously manipulated the sources or even falsified them to serve his own polemical purposes.[15] Rampton's angry argument in defense of

Chernyshevski and committed literature, however, is seriously marred by his ignoring the wider context of the novel and, what is even worse, by his inadequate knowledge of the sources Nabokov alludes to. As Irina Paperno, an authority on Chernyshevski, conclusively showed in a recent study, Nabokov did not distort or concoct biographical facts, but rather artistically "deformed" them, creating a collage of material from several documentary sources; his principal devices for this were the introduction of colors, "vocalization," the addition of proper names and expressive details, the realization of rhetorical figures, montage, etc. Fyodor's treatment of his sources, Paperno argues, is very close to the theories of Russian Formalism, especially to Viktor Shklovsky's concept of literature as "deformation of material," and corresponds to "the central theme of the novel—the idea that life and literature are 'equal,' and that they are mutually reversible."[16]

Different as they are, all the above-mentioned studies share one common flaw: they focus on this or that aspect of *Fyodor*'s writings and therefore substitute a part (or parts) of the novel for the whole, thus ignoring its overall thematic unity. A different approach, one exemplified in the brilliant works of D. Barton Johnson and Vladimir Alexandrov,[17] corrects these "metonymic shifts" by probing and bringing into view matrices of the most important motifs that underlie the loose plot of the text. Johnson searches the pivotal leitmotif of Fyodor's keys with its cluster of branching figurative meanings (memory and artistic genius as *keys* to the forsaken homeland taken abroad; Pushkin's *kliuch*, both a "key" and a "spring" in Russian, which alludes to "the Castalian Spring of inspiration that gives drink to exiles in the worldly steppe"; interpretative *keys* to the novel itself, etc.). He then shows that it is connected with *The Gift*'s structuring as a kind of a chess problem that can be solved only if one finds a correct *key* move. Alexandrov goes much further and deeper when he discovers a complex network of interrelated motifs (childhood illness, footstep, house-room-door-key, etc.) that point to the other world as the center of the space created by the novel. Using much the same tools of textual and intertextual reading, these two outstanding critics come, however, to opposite conclusions about the very essence of the novel. For Johnson, *The Gift* is mostly another Nabokovian involuted artifice, while for Alexandrov, Fyodor's "intimations of immortality" at least hint at actual, lived experience.

The most controversial and widely discussed issues posed by *The Gift* bear on its circular, self-referential structure and narratorial uncertainty. After Irena and Omry Ronen in their insightful essay compared the paradoxical structure of *The Gift* to a Möbius strip, for "the novel being read is at the same time the novel to be written by its protagonist after the narrative's end,"[18] a number of other critics have used this powerful definition to describe the peculiar effect of "two-fold truth" created by the book's finale, which sends a reader back to its very first episode.[19] If during a first reading Fyodor exists as a character whose writings, when inserted into the narration, are, so to say, fiction of the second order, the finale produces a well-calculated ambiguity

with respect to his status. Is he "the author" of the book we have just read to the end? If he is, what kind of text are we dealing with? "A psychogram, perhaps a notebook," as Anna Maria Salehar states?[20] A diary? An autobiography that "truthfully" represents Fyodor's life-story? A novel in its pre-natal stage, a mental project wavering between not-yet-obliterated "reality" and its imaginary emplotments, patternings and transfigurations? Or the final result of a creative process, the actual fulfillment of Fyodor's plan to "shuffle, twist, mix, rechew and rebelch everything," so that "nothing remains of the autobiography but dust—the kind of dust, of course, which makes the most orange of skies" (364)?

The uncertainties on the level of narration, which is constructed as a patchwork of teasingly incongruous voices and modes, can only aggravate the problem. Critics disagree on almost every topic: identity and number of narrators, relations between the first-person and third-person voices, as well as between different narrational "I"s, and so on. Iury Levin in his seminal article asserts that *The Gift* contains no explicit or implied author but its hero.[21] Pekka Tammi distinguishes three narrative modes and argues that Fyodor does not become "the author" of the actual novel, because it is impossible for a character to escape the structure of the Nabokovian narrative itself, or, in other words, to "gain control over a reality *of which his own mind is a part.*"[22] To find a way out of this impasse, Connolly cleaves the persona of Fyodor into two parts—the experiential or "character component" and the "authorial" one.[23] Neither of these theories, however, seems to be conclusive because none encompasses the total dynamic interplay of narrative masks in *The Gift;* and for this reason they leave many questions open. It would be better then if we put off a consideration of narratological enigmata until later, and started our discussion of the novel with problems that are a little less puzzling but hardly less important—those of genre.

"Every original novel is 'anti-' because it does not resemble the genre or kind of its predecessor," quipped Nabokov in an interview (*SO* 173). In this sense *The Gift* is most certainly an exemplary "anti-novel," for it not only synthesizes several incompatible genre models but audaciously transgresses their most sacred laws and plays havoc with readers' genre expectations. Even if a resemblance between *The Gift* and this or that genre model may at times become striking, one should be aware that it is almost certainly a trap, a deception, a false lead, a cunning parodic play.

Some of Nabokov's contemporaries had good reasons to believe that foremost *The Gift* belonged to the genre of satirical *roman à clef* (another tenor of the key-motif overlooked by critics) and portrayed prominent émigré literati under disguise. Mark Aldanov, for instance, immediately recognized Georgy Adamovich, an influential mentor of Russian poets in Paris and an outspoken antagonist of both Nabokov and Khodasevich, in the hilarious figure of Christopher Mortus, whose pretentious attacks against Fyodor Godunov-

Cherdyntsev and his coeval, the genuine young poet Koncheyev, evidently parodied Adamovich's mannerisms.[24] On the other hand, it is worth noting that Petr Bitsilli, usually a very perceptive critic, took Mortus for a caricature of Khodasevich,[25] a staunch ally of Nabokov in all literary battles—an erroneous identification that demonstrates, nevertheless, that Nabokov's disguises were not at all thin even for the initiated. Later on, Nina Berberova stated that the "phantasmal, fiery, magic conversations" between Nabokov and Khodasevich that she had witnessed in Paris served as a model for the imaginary dialogues between Fyodor and Koncheyev in *The Gift*.[26] Quite recently, an over-zealous Russian commentator once again saw in Nabokov's novel a *roman à clef* and suggested a number of preposterous prototypes for some of its secondary characters.[27]

Though Nabokov usually strongly objected to "the prototypical [biographical] quest as blurring the authentic, always atypical methods of genius,"[28] in the case of *The Gift* such a quest seems to be provoked by the text itself. Of all of Nabokov's novels it comes closest to what used to be called *topical literature*, since it now and then refers to events, ideas, burning issues of the day that were at the center of debates in the small world of the Russian émigré *intelligentsia*. In Nabokov's parlance, the "bird-signs and moon-signs" of this "mythical tribe" (*Gift*, Foreword [2]) are scattered throughout the book, and it is quite possible to decode at least some of them as highly charged utterances in the writer's polemical dialogue with his contemporaries. Thus, the story of Yasha Chernyshevski, loosely based on a real case of a dual suicide involving two young lovers in the Grunewald forest (see Nesbet, 1991), responds not only to trite socio-historical interpretations of the incident as "symptoms of the age," but, what is more important, to the tragic end of the "Russian Rimbaud," the talented émigré poet and diarist Boris Poplavsky (1903–1935), who was found dead together with a stranger in a Paris hotel room, presumably a victim of a double suicide-murder with homosexual and drug scene overtones. For Nabokov this surrender of an artist to despair and death is a disgrace, an act of self-betrayal or self-denunciation, a symptom of internal malaise—either a "giftlessness," or an unforgivable "romantic" projection of art onto life. Of course, life *is* tragic and "death *is* inevitable," as the epigraph to the novel bluntly states, but it does not mean that an artist should whine about it or helplessly curse the futility and absurdity of being. On the contrary, he has a unique advantage and responsibility: he is gifted with a heightened creative consciousness that is able to glimpse eternal order under the surface of chaos, to conjure new harmonies, new realities out of everything that has been given to his senses, and thereby to arrest time and prevail over death.

The novel's necrology is long and painful for its hero: Fyodor's first love, his father, the son of a friend, at last the friend himself. Moreover, at almost every step he encounters some reminder of the theme which, in Mortus' words, "none can evade": newspaper obituaries and criminal reports, Zina's grief over

her deceased father, "a pit which had been carefully dug out before its death by the creature that lay therein, a young slender-muzzled dog of wolf ancestry, folded into a wonderfully graceful curve, paws to paws" (331), "the imprint of a daring death beneath the pines" (ibid.) in Grunewald, and so on. But the more he ruminates on inscrutable mysteries of death, the stronger he treasures life as a precious gift,[29] a feast of the senses, an ever-growing stockpile of meaningful interconnected memories that "by means of a momentary alchemic distillation"—a creative transfiguration—can be turned into "something valuable and eternal" (164). In the last chapter of the book Fyodor experiences a series of ecstatic, revelatory moments when he feels himself at one with the visible world and the invisible creative force behind it: "Where shall I put all these gifts with which the summer morning rewards me—and only me? Save them up for future books? Use them immediately for a practical handbook: *How to Be Happy?* Or getting deeper, to the bottom of things: understand what is concealed behind all this, behind the play, the sparkle, the thick, green greasepaint of the foliage? For there really is something, there is something! And one wants to offer thanks but there is no one to thank. The list of donations already made: 10,000 days—from Person Unknown" (328).

Glorifying life and stoically accepting death, Nabokov challenged a stand taken by a group of influential Paris writers, poets, and critics who were faithful and prolific contributors to the "thick" journal *Chisla* (*Numbers*): Georgy Adamovich, Georgy Ivanov, Nikolai Otsup, Boris Poplavsky, Iury Terapiano and others. The editors and authors of *Chisla* mostly shared the persuasion that modern man, an isolated and disillusioned victim of historical upheavals, suffered in the hostile, horrible, cruel world devoid of God, meaning, and beauty, and was torn between a will to death as the only way out of his existential hell and a fear of death as eternal annihilation of the self. The duty of an artist then was to pour out his or her angst in "human documents"—spontaneous expressions of inner torments and doubts. The "obsession of *Chisla*'s authors with death themes," to cite a critic in *Sovremennye zapiski*,[30] became popular among younger émigré intellectuals, but at the same time antagonized some influential thinkers and writers, and *The Gift* reverberates with echoes of the controversy. There are certain connections between the novel's emphasis on the inherent beauty of the phenomenal world as well as an artist's self-obliteration in the process of its imaginative demiurgic transfiguration, and ideas of *Chisla*'s opponents, especially Khodasevich, Vladimir Weidle, and Georgy Fedotov.[31] Making fun of Mortus's enthusiastic praise for "artless and sorrowful" confessions, outpourings of "moral *angoisse*," "human documents" dictated by "emotion and despair" (168), Nabokov hits the same targets as, say, Khodasevich in his fierce fight against *Chisla*.[32]

Even more important for understanding *The Gift* in the contemporary context is the so-called "anti-cultural" position of *Chisla* that was noticed and criticized by all its adversaries. Asserting the supremacy of an individual unshackled spirit over universal logos, Adamovich and Otsup (in *The Gift*

their names are once telescoped into "Tzypovich") wrote about the "inadequacy and uselessness" of art and language, proclaimed and welcomed "the bankruptcy of the idea of artistic perfection" and "the end of literature," while their uncouth disciple Boris Poplavsky rendered the same ideas in the form of rough paradoxes like "art doesn't exist, and all for the better," "it is vulgar to love art," or "any beauty is ominously repulsive in its perfection, isn't it?"[33] Because in the Russian mind the concepts of Apollonian beauty and artistic measure have always been associated with Pushkin and his heritage, the authors of *Chisla* started a campaign against Pushkin's legacy.[34] The poems of Pushkin, preached Adamovich, were not "worlds" but fragile and sweetened "things" without depth, self-contained "circles" leading nowhere and lacking any awareness of spiritual "abysses," and the poet could be called a "miracle" only in quotation marks because his genius was "inexplicably precocious, suspicious, perhaps rotten in its roots."[35] Poplavsky named Pushkin "the last of the magnificent 'major-keyed' but dirty Renaissance men," "the largest worm," and condemned him for frivolity and irony unacceptable to the Russian soul.[36] The very progression of Pushkin from the sonorous poetry of the 1820s towards the austere *The Bronze Horseman* and the prose of the 1830s, in Adamovich's view, is an instructive story of ultimate surrender, of the poet's disillusionment with his own glib talent and his gradual falling into the silence of non-writing.[37]

Throughout *The Gift* Nabokov takes issue with these efforts of *Chisla*'s authors to repudiate the values of cultural continuity and to dethrone Pushkin: he mocks them in his caustic parodies and asides; he humiliates and ridicules their ultra-modern doctrine by implying its direct analogy to Chernyshevski's obsolete and crude views on art; he defies them with the very plot, the involuted "Apollonian" structure, the thematic patterning of the novel. Fyodor's filial attachment to Russian culture and, in particular, to Pushkin ("Pushkin entered his blood. With Pushkin's voice merged the voice of his father" [98]), inverts the catchwords of Adamovich and Poplavsky. He stubbornly rejects the notion that "words are pale corpses, that words are incapable of expressing our thingummy-bob feelings" (154) and believes in the omnipotence of language and literature.[38] Contrary to Poplavsky who opposed art and pity ("A crushed rabbit paw is more important than the Louvre and Propylaea"[39]), Fyodor asserts that art is nothing but pity—"a piercing pity . . . for all the trash of life" (164), "the only way" to enable any mortal substance, be it things or people, "to sprout up" to eternity. In his view, "formal perfection" is not an outdated concept but the central attribute—which has nothing to do with soul-searching and self-expression—of any genuine art, and he extols Pushkin as the sun of the Russian cultural cosmos, the ideal Poet, whose Apollonian creed will forever remain a "tuning fork" for all aspiring artists. Unlike Adamovich, Fyodor is able to imagine "Pushkin at sixty, Pushkin spared two decades ago by the bullet of the fatal coxcomb," and this resurrected gray-haired Pushkin has "a bright sparkle in his youthful eyes" and enjoys "the *rich* autumn of his

genius" (101; italics added) rather than vegetating in creative muteness and sterility.

For the hero of *The Gift*, his cultural heritage and language are the only homeland "which is with [him], lives in [his] eyes, [his] blood" (175) and where he can hope to return; the only indestructible "house" to which he has his own "keys"; the only ever-existing community he is eager to join. Almost as clownishly clumsy and inept in everyday life as his pathetic Chernyshevski (both of them suffer from what could be called, after the main character of Olesha's *Envy*, "the Kavalerov syndrome"—things do not like them), Fyodor feels at ease only "at home"—in the realm of Russian and Western literature where his own creations interact with those of his predecessors and contemporaries, and where, say, Dostoevsky's Svidrigailov, "a gentleman with a blond beard and unusually red lips" (313)[40] can be present at the funeral of his "cousin," the character in *The Gift* itself. The collective memory of culture, together with individual memory, sustain his artistic evolution, and he, an avid and attentive reader, carries on a never-ending dialogue with and about Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Blok, and dozens of other Russian writers.

In his pioneering study of *The Gift*, Simon Karlinsky remarked that "not since *Eugene Onegin* has a major Russian novel contained such a profusion of literary discussions, allusions and writers' characterizations,"[41] and for this reason defined it as "a work of literary criticism." The term "criticism," however, does not seem appropriate here, for all the displays of literary acumen in the book are embedded in its master plot of Fyodor's artistic growth and cannot be separated from the subjectivity of his innate creative urge. Fyodor (or, for that matter, Nabokov) never evaluates literary facts from without, as an objective observer, but only from within, as an active participant in their interaction who is looking for precedents and points of departure, for similarities and dissimilarities, for frameworks and oppositions. Thus, in his first imaginary conversation with Koncheyev, he judges a number of Russian writers by their "art of literary portrayal," or, better, their ability to produce striking *visual* images (72–73). Since this is exactly where *his own* forte lies, he selects his predecessors by affinity, and at the same time dissociates himself from those writers and texts that do not obey the set of strict rules he has elaborated for his writings.

Much like Central Asia for his father, literature is Fyodor's "private game reserve" (66) where he gets both his fun and his vital nourishment, and it is worth noting that his relations with literary predecessors are often described in the novel via metaphors of traveling, shooting, and feeding. Through interconnected acts of selection, appropriation and rejection, which parallel his artistic development, Fyodor, "a mere seeker of verbal adventures" (139), construes and constructs his personal "great tradition," his own cultural genealogy. He wants to be seen as a legitimate successor to the Pushkin-Gogol-Tolstoy-Chekhov line (with the curious addition of the travelogue

sub-branch stretching from Pushkin's *Journey to Arzrum* to the books by Russian explorers of Central Asia), one who inherits and sports some familial traits but at the same time takes up where they have left off. It is highly relevant that the gestational metamorphosis of Fyodor's gift—"a burden inside himself" (108)—takes him through certain phases loosely corresponding to those of his own tradition: in a sense, artistic ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. The process starts when he rediscovers Pushkin's prose and feels "a divine stab" of inspiration that transforms him into a prosaist—the change repeating the final step of Pushkin's evolution and therefore receiving the highest sanction. The unmarked quotations from Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* ("He was in that state of feeling and mind 'when reality, giving way to fancies, blends with them in the nebulous visions of first sleep'" [97][42]) and Grum-Grzhimailo's *Description of a Journey to Western China*,[43] smoothly and seamlessly inserted into the narration; the Gogolian soliloquy in the end of chapter 2 ("Have you ever happened, reader . . ." [see 144]) foreshadowing Fyodor's move to the new residence associated with "Gogol Street" in St. Petersburg and his subsequent reading and applying of *Dead Souls* and Gogol's letters; the interior monologue of dying Alexander Chernyshevski (311–12) that subtly intermingles the ragged syntax of Anna Karenina's stream of consciousness in the famous pre-suicide scene of Tolstoy's novel and the themes referring to "The Death of Ivan Ilyich"; the Chekhovian use of details and phraseology in the final episodes with Zina and her departing parents (signalled by a fleeting reference to "*a lady . . . with a* goggled-eyed, trembling *little dog*," 361; "*dama . . . s* glazastoi, drozhashchei *sobachkoi*," *Dar* 405)—these are just a few instances when *The Gift* points at its progenitors and demands recognition as their heir apparent.

According to Nabokov, however, the truly fruitful position of a modern writer in the vast field of literary traditions and established norms should be far from serene acceptance. When any gifted newcomer enters the crowded scene, he claims and defines his place there not only by inventing his lineage but also by rejecting or negating a number of other alternatives that would hinder his natural growth. In order to "acquire wings," Fyodor must overcome and denigrate the "ugly, crippling school" of Russian Symbolism with its "wretched sham, the masks of mediocrity and the stilts of talent" (149–153), distance himself from Dostoevsky as the forefather of the opposite line that denies "the blessing of sensory cognition" and therefore "brings to mind . . . a room in which a lamp burns during the day" (316), and, at last, exorcise the arch-demons of Russian culture: those numerous "progressive" writers and critics of various convictions—from Belinsky and Chernyshevski to Gorky and Communist ideologists, on the one hand, and such anti-communists as Dmitry Merezhkovsky, Zinaida Gippius or Fedor Stepun, on the other, who saw in literature only a useful vehicle for disseminating their ideas and turned it into an "eternal tributary to this or that Golden Horde" (202). These alternatives are not just empty husks—they have a power and attraction of their

own, and even Fyodor is sometimes in danger of falling under their spell. He has to be constantly on the alert, for instance, not to succumb to Dostoevsky-like indignant generalizations about Germans (81–82), not to take Mortus's side against Koncheyev (168–69), not to "confess something to [Russia] and to convince her of something" (204), etc. On the level of narration the demons reappear again and again in the form of haunting clichés, stock phrases, easily recognizable devices, and can be killed only by a parodic twist or an ironic exposure of their origins. That is why the novel abounds with revelatory meta-remarks (either introduced in parentheses, or implanted into the text proper[44]) that testify to the narrator's intertextual awareness and cunning polemical intent as he imitates the formerly persuasive voice of the other.

The intensity and scope of *The Gift*'s dialogue with various literary traditions and voices (unprecedented in Russian prose) can be fully explicated only if we read it as a programmatic statement, a Magna Charta of exilic creative behavior, rather than just the first prototype of the intertextual play in *Pale Fire* or *Ada*. Nabokov was obviously looking for an answer to the crucial question raised by a number of émigré writers and critics in the 1930s: how can literature survive in the conditions of exile? The prevailing points of view were marked by pessimism and even defeatism. Mark Slonim declared that émigré literature was doomed to die because the loss of the homeland impeded any artistic development and imminently brought about creative impotence and stagnation.[45] Vladimir Varshavsky contended that the tragic destiny of younger exiled writers was to exist in a total vacuum, without any human and social ties, more lonely and more alienated from the outside world than a man on an uninhabited island, and to see, feel and express nothing but anguish at their absolute isolation.[46] With the sole exception of Sirin, "the writer out of an environment, out of a homeland, out of the world," émigré literature turned out to be sterile and lifeless, argued Gaito Gazdanov, and named three reasons for this: the lack of readers, the lack of socio-psychological foundations, and the lack of moral comprehension.[47] In Fedor Stepun's view, émigré writers were unable to create anything significant because of their obsession with petty reminiscences and their betrayal of essential national memories, and he called upon them to work out a unifying political outlook—"a post-revolutionary consciousness"—and to find a remedy for isolation in heroically serving the common cause.[48]

Nabokov's position in this controversy, as always, went counter to all the standard opinions and was close only to that of Khodasevich. In the important essay "Literature in Exile" (1933) the latter suggested that all the failures and deficiencies of émigré literature resulted from its inability to give meaning to the very fact of exile and to turn it into an advantage, a basis on which new artistic sensitivity, new ideas, and new literary forms could be elaborated and developed.[49] An exemplary artist-in-exile, the hero of *The Gift* demonstrates "what is to be done" in order to achieve this goal. In the end of the book Fyodor defines his isolation in alien Germany not as the "terrible," "cold," "dark,"

"prison-like" void of Gazdanov or Varshavsky, but as "the *wonderful* solitude . . . , the *wonderful, beneficient* contrast between [his] inner habitus and the terribly cold world around [him]," and adds: "you know, in cold countries houses are warmer than in the south, better insulated and heated" (350; italics added). Nabokov's exilic artist finds his recompense for separation and displacement, for the severance of external social ties, in his communion with a number of interiorized realities sustaining his omnivorous and omnipotent imagination. The first is the reality of the phenomenal world, especially nature with its supra-aesthetic delights, "enchanting deceptions" of mimicry, transformations, patterns and designs—the reality that should be acutely observed and probed by the "wide-open orbs" of Pushkin's poet-prophet, because everything in it, from beautiful butterflies and the "Elysian hues" of a rainbow to "the tin box in a waste patch" (164) or even "a ragged mattress with rusty, broken springs" (331), *equally* deserves artistic attention and can receive new, sudden meanings when represented in verbal structures. The second is the reality of other people that enables the artist to transcend, through curiosity, sympathy, or pity, his own ego and "to imagine the inner, transparent motion of this or that other person . . . to seat himself inside the interlocutor as in an armchair, so that the other's elbows would serve as armrests for him, and his soul would fit snugly into the other's soul" (35–36)—that is, to recreate and appropriate the other as a potential fictional character. The third is the reality of the past, "the hothouse paradise" brutally taken away, that he incessantly relives in his reminiscences, "swift and senseless, visiting him like an attack of a fatal illness at any hour, in any place" (80), and that can actually be regained only in the union of imagination and memory, "Mimir and Mnemosyne." The fourth is the reality of the Russian language and culture that, abused and defiled in a homeland where "everything had become so shoddy, so crabbed and gray" (175), finds its sanctuary in the exilic mind keeping it alive through productive acts of reconsideration and reevaluation, of renewal and development. The fifth is the reality of his private self with its feelings, urges, fears, hopes, dreams, and fantasies that should be distinguished from the artist's creative consciousness (defined as "somebody within him" [4] or "the principal Fyodor Konstantinovich, and in fact the only Fyodor Konstantinovich that mattered" [55]) and subordinated to the latter as another source of "material" used and obliterated in the process of creation. The sixth is the reality of the other world, "a radiance outside our blindness" (342), dimly intuited by Nabokov's hero as an eternal presence of some supreme creative mind that, in the final analysis, is responsible for the unfathomable "text" or "theatre" of life—"the reverse side of a magnificent fabric, on the front of which there gradually formed and became alive images invisible to him" (314)—and that manifests itself in the retrospectively grasped coherence and design of individual experience. It is this intuitive knowledge that enables the artist to transcend tragic history, or, better, to reinterpret its whips and scorn as meaningful and indispensable pieces in the puzzle of his unfolding *fate*. As a

result he understands the ultimate purpose of his existence: to insert his preordained writings into empty slots left for them in the all-embracing pattern of being (hence his feeling that he is to "recollect his future books") and thus become a co-author, or "sub-author," of the semiotic universe.

These realities provide Fyodor with an inexhaustible stockpile of building blocks to be recombined, restructured, and reshaped into the new, "second" reality of art, and his active imagination superimposes them upon each other by the art of "multiple thinking," turns primary facts into fiction, and adds to it new fictions of its own. Even when he is writing biographical books based on traceable documentary sources, Fyodor plays with fictitious narrators (the memoirist A.N. Suhoshchokov in the book on his father and the critic Strannolyubski in *The Life of Chernyshevski*), but his ultimate goal is to advance from a Formalist "deforming" of the material towards its complete dissolving in the melting pot of the text. The "degree of fictionalization" in his prose writings continually rises as the tangibility of their objects diminishes (the beloved father, the historical figure Chernyshevski, the invented sage Delalande[50]), and paradoxically should reach its climax in the planned "auto-biography"—a synthetic fictional transfiguration of all the realities in which its author had ever existed.

It is clear that such an approach to the position of the exilic writer precludes any commitments to something like Stepun's common cause or Gippius's religious foundations. Every genuine artist, in Nabokov's deepest conviction, is, by definition, a loner whose thoughts live "in their own private house and not in a barrack-room or a pub" (321), and belongs only to his individual calling and, hence, to eternity. Even the lack of readers—the plague of émigré literature—does not trouble him so much, for in his heart of hearts he wants to believe that "the real writer should ignore all readers but one, that of the future, who in his turn is merely the author reflected in time" (340). He participates in a dialogue with his peers through his works, not through his speeches, and that is why Fyodor *imagines* his conversations with Koncheyev and never says a word to Vladimirov, another loner-genius, who has "a certain affinity with him," while at the same time he is anxious to know if this "author of two novels—outstanding for the force and swiftness of their mirror-like style" has read his book (321). Their bonds, based on mutual recognition of "gifts," are, in Nabokov's words, "rather divine" because they are growing "on another plane" of being and have nothing to do with the various literary movements, unions, and groups widespread in the emigration ("mystical organizations or associations of poets, where a dozen tightly knit mediocrities 'glow' by their own efforts" [341]).

"Tightly knit mediocrities," both of the historical past (i. e., Chernyshevski and his coterie) and the émigré present, are contrasted in *The Gift* to real artists and portrayed with devastating scorn and derision. In a number of satirical scenes (reminiscent of Il'f and Petrov or Bulgakov) and parodies Nabokov presents his own ship of literary fools: a playwright whose "farcical accent and

bizarre solecisms were incompatible with the obscurity of his meaning" (66); an author of "a long story about a romantic adventure in the town of a hundred eyes, beneath skies unknown" who placed his epithets after the nouns for the sake of beauty (93);[51] a novelist who "was blind like Milton, deaf like Beethoven, and a blockhead to boot" (315); a poet-mystic, "the illiterate bum with a heavy, drunken gaze" (322), and a whole bunch of other, even less talented, hacks, imposters and nonentities. It is this gallery of farcical secondary characters that compels readers to surmise some real faces under their masks, and Nabokov does leave a few clues that point at some of his contemporaries, though he prefers to conceal them among numerous false leads and traps. Most illustrative of this overall strategy is his usage of significant names—a standard device of a *roman à clef*. A subtle linguo-lepidopterological connection between the names of Mortus and Adamovich, first discovered by John Malmstad,[52] is a good example of a well-hidden riddling clue extremely difficult to crack, while many other, seemingly less covert, onomastic hints often turn out to be misleading. It would be impetuous, for example, to regard the name "Shirin" (which belongs to the blind and deaf blockhead mentioned above) as an ironic signature of *The Gift*'s author "Sirin" (that is, Nabokov). Rather, it alludes simultaneously to two ardent Russian nationalists: Yury *Shirin*sky-Shikhmatov, the editor of the political journal *Utverzhdeniia* (*Assertions*), and the novelist Ivan Shmelev, who was known as a singer of Russian *shir'* (boundlessness, open space) and an émigré Dostoevsky.[53]

In a letter to Mark Aldanov, who had protested against his parodying Adamovich in the guise of Mortus, Nabokov explained that his lampoonery was not meant to be, in Zina's words, "mass executions of good acquaintances" (364): "I was guided not by an urge to laugh at this or that person (although there would be no crime in that—we are not in class or in church), but solely by a desire to show a certain order of literary ideas, typical at a given time—which is what the whole novel is about (its main heroine is literature)."[54] Because the targets of Nabokov's "firing practice" were mainly literary ideas and styles rather than personalities, he did not follow the basic rule of a *roman à clef*—the simple, univalent correlation of a real figure with her/his representation. Instead, he took *la clef*, the master key to his rendering of an émigré milieu, away from his readers, deliberately blending characteristics and attributes of several prototypes. That is why all attempts to pinpoint a *single* prototype for any of the novel's characters appear to be so ineffective.

Another example of Nabokov's blending and blurring of prototypes in the novel is the figure of Koncheyev, the only rival of the hero, a poetic prodigy, in whose poems "there dwelt . . . such music, in the seemingly dark verse such a chasm of meaning yawned at one's feet, so convincing were the sounds and so unexpectedly, out of the very same words every poet was stringing together, there sprang up, played, and slipped away . . . a unique perfection, bearing no resemblance to words and in no need of words" (93), that Fyodor in the first

chapters of the book, like Pushkin's Salieri, cannot help admiring them and feeling smothering envy toward their author. The critical tradition has persistently identified him with Khodasevich, although Nabokov in his Foreword to *The Gift* avowed that he distinguished in Koncheyev (as well as in the novelist Vladimirov) "odds and ends" of himself as he was circa 1925. At first glance Nabokov's testimony does look like banter or a rather clumsy attempt to cover his tracks, for it is impossible to find in Koncheyev—an old-fashioned, starchy, sickly, unpleasant, myopic hermit with a "round-shouldered, almost humpbacked figure" (64–65), a shy provincial or a Muscovite who resents the "St. Petersburg style" (341), an accomplished and recognized poetic genius with no ambitions in prose—anything that would resemble the young, sporty, affable Sirin of the mid-1920s, a minor imitative poet of the "St. Petersburg school" who was abandoning poetry for fiction. However, beside this "real" Koncheyev there exists another one in the novel—the figment of the protagonist's creative mind, the image contrived by Fyodor to serve as his ideal, all-comprehending interlocutor and critic, his, so to say, "secret sharer," to whom he can address his writings. As Fyodor's artistic self-assurance and control grow, the second Koncheyev changes from a stooge of the envious hero who simply projects onto him his own point of view (in their first imaginary conversation they are almost indistinguishable) into the separate, independent, authoritative voice of a coeval that complements and checks its contriver when the latter becomes too eager or self-indulgent. In other words, Fyodor's mind finally creates a necessary corrective for itself—a sympathetic, but exacting ally, a semi-double, and, as such, Koncheyev cannot but parallel in some essential aspects Nabokov's own attitude toward his hero (or, for that matter, Khodasevich's attitude toward Nabokov).[55]

As for the "real" Koncheyev, it is clear that Nabokov did not try to model him either on himself or on Khodasevich. In contrast to the latter, Koncheyev is very young, even a year younger than Godunov-Cherdyntsev, and therefore, in spite of his name (in Russian *konchat'* means *to end* or *to finish*), does not end the great poetical tradition but renews and continues it, or, to play once more upon his name, becomes the keeper of the sacred *conch* which is a symbol of eternity[56] and the prosperity of a new generation rising out of the preceding one. Like Fyodor and Vladimirov in the realm of prose, Koncheyev is the legitimate heir to the throne of Russian poetry, the throne of Blok, Bunin, and Khodasevich; he is a promise and a hope rather than a representation of reality, because young émigré literature did not have a figure of such scale and splendor. That is why his personality and his poetry incorporate certain features of several of the most auspicious talents (in Nabokov's view) among the author's generation—Vladimir Korvin-Piotrovsky, Anatoly Ladinsky, Vladimir Smolensky, even Boris Poplavsky and, probably, Boris Pasternak (whose poems Nabokov defined as "dark," exactly like those of his character[57]).

If the fragment of a poem by Koncheyev condenses and synthesizes those poetic voices in which Nabokov spotted signs of originality and talent (170;

Dar 191), Shirin's novel *The Hoary Abyss* (315), by contrast, is a hodgepodge of the sham, hackneyed themes and crude stereotypical devices of several influential writers packed into a little parodic compendium of contemporary prose. It aims simultaneously at the most notorious Soviet novelists of the 1920s: Boris Pil'niak, Evgeny Zamiatin, Il'ia Erenburg, Konstantin Fedin, as well as at two fashionable émigré authors of the 1930s: Vasily Ianovsky, whose novel *Mir* (*The World*) Nabokov ridiculed in a newspaper review,[58] and Boris Temiriazev (the literary pseudonym of the painter Iury Annenkov). More specifically, the overall montage technique of the pastiche with its abrupt changes of location and setting in each phrase (New York, Paris, Moscow, London, the North Pole) mocks Pilniak's *Tret'ia stolitsa* (*The Third Capital*),[59] Erenburg's *Trust D. E.*, and Temiriazev's *Povest' o pustiakakh* (*A Tale about Trifles*). In the latter novel one can find a long soliloquy with repeated appeals to God[60] that is parodied by the refrain of the passage ("Oh Lord, our Father . . . Oh Lord, why? . . . Oh Lord, why dost Thou permit all this?"). Shirin's Moscow killer who tenderly coaxes "a shaggy pup" alludes to Zamiatin's famous short story "Drakon" ("The Dragon"), in which a brutal Bolshevik executioner coos to a freezing sparrow. The absurdly metaphoric exposure of Americans "running after the golden calf . . . in a feverish rustle of dollars" burlesques Pilniak's politically correct *O.K.: An American Novel*, just as the "decrepit vagabond" in Paris who "trampled under his boots an ancient prostitute, Boule de Suif" (an obvious allusion to Maupassant's story of the same title) derides the trite "naturalism" of Ianovsky, whose *Mir* and other writings abound in such scenes.[61]

The Gift does not allow one to pose the central question of any *roman à clef*—"who is who?"—but encodes it as "who is what?" so that to answer it we do not need any extratextual information after all. Much the same can be said about the novel's autobiographical element, which seems on the surface to be as teasingly obvious as its topicality. "In fact, in *The Gift* Nabokov draws on his past more than anywhere else in his fiction,"[62] contends the writer's biographer Brian Boyd, who provides a long and persuasive list of direct correspondences between Fyodor and his creator: some incidents from early childhood, happy summers spent on paradisiac country manors near St. Petersburg, first struggles in verse and the subsequent evolution to prose, numerous accidentals of émigré existence, passions for homeland, family, language, butterflies, chess. It is evident, however, that all the autobiographical material in the novel has been very carefully selected and filtered in order to bar readers from essential secrets of the author's private life. Giving his visage, his sweater, and his shortened curriculum vitae as of spring 1929 (twenty-nine years old, an English university graduate, the author of two novels), not to the protagonist but to the incidental character *Vladimir*ov, who makes his fleeting appearence in a single scene of *The Gift* immediately after references to three characters from *Vladimir* Sirin's previous books, Podtyagin (*Mary*), Ivan Luzhin (*The*

Defense) and Zilanov (*Glory*), the writer separates his factual biography from that of his hero and emphasizes its irrelevance in the world of his fiction.

Autobiographical components of *The Gift* connected with Fyodor can be divided into two distinct classes. The first consists of personal reminiscences and characteristics that were originally addressed to a very narrow, intimate circle of readers initiated into Nabokov's private background. No one except for a few members of his family and closest friends would have enough information to recognize in, say, the alleys and lawns of Fyodor's Leshino an exact reproduction of the writer's beloved Vyra, and to understand that in describing the protagonist's "clairvoyant spell" (22–24), his *audition colorée* (74), or his Andrei Bely inspired versification exercises (150–52), he rendered his own life. Only after Nabokov had disclosed, to use the title of Rudyard Kipling's autobiography, "something about himself" in *Speak, Memory* and its Russian variant *Drugie berega*, did it become possible to identify appropriate parts of the text as autobiographical. But even then, in striking contrast to such seminal fictionalized autobiographies as Tolstoy's trilogy and Bunin's *The Life of Arseniev*,[63] the proportion of these personal recollections in the narrative remains extremely small, and they do not tell anything about either the protagonist's interactions with other people or his moral and psychological growth. Rather, Fyodor shares with the author some unique, singular states of mind, some revelatory moments that can be decoded as epiphanies of multiple realities and/or presentiments of an artistic calling only retrospectively, in the process of writing them into a new system of signifiers. That is why autobiographical reminiscences in *The Gift* are often introduced by special markers that accentuate the very act of their recreation (like, for instance, the repeated phrase "Let us describe" [21] which precedes the passage about childhood illnesses as analogues to leaps of creative imagination beyond the limits of time and space) and why they are connected through a network of leitmotifs with other, purely fictional episodes. Their function is to indicate certain essential, paradigmatic points at which the artistic emergence (rather than the biography proper) of Fyodor and that of his creator overlap, though their works written after more or less congenial juvenilia have little in common besides dazzling style.

The second class embraces those autoreferences that are positional and relational rather than factual. As far as mere biographical facts were concerned, Nabokov was in the right when he dissuaded readers from identifying "the designer with the design" on the grounds that he had never wooed Zina Mertz and that his father, in contrast to Konstantin Godunov-Cherdyntsev, was not the explorer of Central Asia (see second paragraph of the Foreword to *The Gift*). He did go out of his way to invent for all the main characters of the novel detailed case histories that diverged from those of their possible prototypes so widely that any overt resemblance could not but disappear. Neither the life of Fyodor's father, "a great explorer, a courageous eccentric who had discovered new animals in Tibet, the Pamirs and other blue lands" (65), nor his mysterious

death-as-vanishing have any likeness to the well-known biography of Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov, a liberal lawyer, journalist, and statesman who was passionately interested not in butterflies but in political and social issues of the day, and was shot dead by an ultra-right assassin during a political rally in Berlin. At the same time, in the very vectors of Fyodor's feelings about his father, in his immense love, respect, gratitude, and grief for the strong, independent, genuine man from whom he "borrows his wings" (115), in his awe of Konstantin Kirillovich's ultimate secret—an unsolvable, undefinable and indestructible "something" that separated him even from his beloved wife and children—one can unequivocally recognize the pattern of Nabokov's own "filial piety." Confronted with the tragic loss, young Nabokov, exactly like his hero, was eager not to give into the temptation of despair and instead tried to console himself "with the familiar dream of his father's return," imagining their reunion "beyond the boundary of earthly life" (88). In 1925 he wrote to his mother: "I am so certain, my love, that we will see him again, in an unexpected but completely natural heaven, in a realm where all is radiance and delight. He will come towards us in our common bright eternity, slightly raising his shoulders as he used to do, and we will kiss the birthmark on his hand without surprise. . . . Everything will return."[64] However, such a soothing hope cannot by itself alleviate the "sickening terror" of the thought that existence in time with its imminent changes divorces the living from the dead and cuts the spiritual bond between them. It is this metaphysical fear that explains why Fyodor's father at first appears to him in nightmares "as if just returned from some monstrous penal servitude . . . and with a completely uncharacteristic expression of unpleasant, momentous sullenness" (87–88); and why the lyrical narrator of Nabokov's early story "Slovo" ("The Word"), published side by side with a posthumous article on his father as an obvious tribute to the latter,[65] meets "the dear deceased" transformed into an awesome angel and forgets a salvatory word entrusted to him a moment before they part forever.

To retain and eternalize the image of the beloved father Fyodor undertakes to write his biography, but after a year of ecstatic work produces only "swarms of drafts, long manuscript extracts from books" and "pitiful notes" (138–39). Although he feels that a "lucid, orderly" text does exist in his mind, "hiding in this inky jungle," the task of "freeing it from the darkness," or translating it into an actual verbal entity seems impracticable to him. A biography of Fyodor's father, in contrast to that of Chernyshevski, cannot and should not be written because of two unsurmountable obstacles: love and spiritual kinship. Everyone is transparent for the imagination of a genuine artist except for those whom he loves because their integrity and inner mysteries are sacred and therefore opaque. In fact, Fyodor acknowledges this himself when he says: "I try fervently in the darkness to divine the current of his thoughts, and I have much less success with this than with my mental visits to places which I have never seen. What did he think about?" (119).

Neither is there a need on Fyodor's part to recreate Konstantin Godunov-Cherdyntsev's travels, for they have been adequately described by him and his friends. Simple, unadorned accounts of naturalists, as Fyodor finally understands, possess "the amazing music of truth," and his attempts to sharpen and refresh their perception of reality contaminate them "with a kind of secondary poetization, which keeps departing further and further from that real poetry with which the live experience of these receptive, knowledgeable and chaste naturalists endowed their research" (139). In the final analysis, Fyodor's choice not to write the biography, his refusal to commit a sacrilege by projecting his own fancies upon the precious, self-contained universe of his father's life and work not only express his love for the great man but equate them as fellow artists who have the same "gift" of creative consciousness, the same independence, the same acuity of senses, the same intuition of "something beyond," though they fulfill themselves on different "hunting grounds."

"I hate tampering with the precious lives of great writers and I hate Tom-peeping over the fence of those lives" (*LRL* 138) stated Nabokov in his lectures on Tolstoy. The sources of this hatred can be traced back to the 1920s and 1930s when the genre of the so-called *biographie romancée* became extremely popular both in Western and in Russian literature. Some authors at that time (notably André Maurois in France, Iury Tynianov and Ol'ga Forsh in the Soviet Union, Boris Zaitsev in emigration) did tamper with lives of famous writers and poets, and in *The Gift* (and, for that matter, in his next novel *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*) Nabokov subjected their works to utter scorn. When he derisively alludes to "those idiotic *'biographies romancées'* where Byron is coolly slipped a dream extracted from one of his own poems" (200), Fyodor strikes at a blind spot of the genre—the trivialization of relations between life and art misunderstood as primitive glosses on each other. For Nabokov, in Chateaubriand's dictum, "the real destiny of a poet is a Muse," and the very palimpsest-like structure of *The Gift* demonstrates how an ideal biography of an artist should be composed. It seems that the novel follows guidelines formulated by Vladimir Weidle, a friend and an astute critic of Nabokov, who wrote in 1931: "We feel that a genuine biography of a poet would be written only if an author were able to include in it not only the reality of his life but also fictions engendered by this life, not only realities of existence but also realities of imagination. The real biography of a creative person shall represent his life as a process of creation and see in his creations the transfigured life."[66] This alchemic formula, however, works well when a poet and his writings are fictitious, like in the case of Fyodor; in all the other cases it is inapplicable because any "reality of imagination" automatically erases the pre-history of its emergence that can never be satisfactorily reconstructed. In the context of *The Gift* a biography of Chernyshevski becomes possible insofar as the "mental and verbal style" of the great teacher and martyr, a paragon of civic virtues, betrays in him an impostor who hides the lack of creative sensibility under the disguise of a thinker and a writer and whose destiny,

therefore, is not a Muse, but "Musa," a red-cheeked informer for the secret police, and other petty demons—"blockheads, crackbrains and madmen." Lampooning the image of Chernyshevski, defamiliarizing it, Nabokov's hero performs an act of cultural self-purification, denounces his harmful heritage, and only after this can he step toward the Pushkinian "horizon of the free novel." *The Life of Chernyshevski* proves that a biography written by a real artist defames, exorcizes, scorches rather than extols, and, by implication, justifies Fyodor's decision not to write a biography of his father.

It does not mean, of course, that Fyodor's year-long effort has been to no avail. On the contrary, by focusing his nostalgic memory on the Supreme Being of his pre-exilic past, by remembering "with incredible vividness" (125) all the minutiae of his father's physique and moral character, "the chill and the warmth of his personality," the magic of his voice and of his lessons, by reading his works and doing extensive research into various sources, and by straining his imagination so as to relive the exotic journeys and discoveries of the great pathfinder, Fyodor is creating a three-dimensional, immovable image that will leave its mark on everything he accomplishes in life and in art. From now on Fyodor's father is always with him (cf. the "funny name" of his German landlady: Klara Stoboy—"which to a Russian ear sounded with sentimental firmness as "Klara is with thee"[67]), and not in the vulgar form of a ghost like the one haunting the deranged mind of Yasha's father but as a constant radiant presence at the core of his artistic consciousness, its tuning fork and catalyst. The hero's quest reaches its climax in the Grunewald episode when he experiences a genuine epiphanic moment of inspiration-cum-self-transcendence described through metaphors of nakedness, flaming, melting and dissolving: "The sun bore down. The sun licked me all over with its big, smooth tongue. I gradually felt that I was becoming moltenly transparent, that I was permeated with flame and existed only insofar as it did. . . . My personal I . . . had somehow disintegrated and dissolved; after being made transparent by the strength of the light, it was now assimilated to the shimmering of the summer forest" (334). At last he acquires the ultimate, unrestricted freedom of a creator, and immediately imagines "his father's isolation in other forests—gigantic, infinitely distant, in comparison with which this one was but brushwood, a tree stump, rubbish" (335). It is the "stellar explosion" of inspiration that resurrects the dead because it is "akin to that Asiatic freedom spreading wide on the maps, to the spirit of his father's peregrinations" (335), and, one should add, to love. A creative insight that is engendered by the acute pain of an irrevocable loss, if not justifying this loss, at least invests it with an eternal meaning and thus, in a sense, overcomes absence and death. In the Grunewald scene Fyodor's artistic consciousness finally bursts out of its cocoon, and, as a reward, he is granted a blissful reunion with his father, "unharmed, whole, human, and real," whose return crowns a dream in which trajectories of the hero's past conjoin patterns of his future novel: "Noiselessly but with terrible force the door flew open, and on the threshold stood his

father . . . then he spoke again—and this again meant that everything was right and simple, that this was the true resurrection, that it could not be otherwise, and also: that he was pleased—pleased with his captures, his return, his son's book about him—and then at last everything grew easy, a light broke through, and his father with confident joy spread out his arms. With a moan and a sob Fyodor stepped toward him, and in the collective sensation of woolen jacket, big hands and the tender prickle of trimmed mustaches there swelled an ecstatically happy, living, enormous, paradisal warmth in which his icy heart melted and dissolved" (355). Self-transcendence through love and memory for Nabokov is synonymous to self-transcendence through art, and that is why the imagery here (light, breakthrough, warmth, melting, dissolution) echoes that of the Grunewald revelation.[68]

The epiphanic scenes of *The Gift* discussed above bear a strong resemblance to an earlier Nabokov poem "Vecher na pustyre" ("Evening on a Vacant Lot," 1932), later subtitled "*In memory of V. D. N.*," i.e., of his father Vladimir Dmitrievich. The persona in the poem summons his creative powers and experiences divine inspiration that is metaphorically equated to a sunset reflected in a "single window, fiery" and to "a far breeze, an aerial envoy with increasing noise penetrating dense woods." At this moment he, like Fyodor, is getting "self-lost, melting in the air and sunset" and starts to transmute the surrounding "trash of solitary outskirts"—the skull of a dog, weedy flowers, a deformed tin can (all these images will be repeated in *The Gift*)—into a supramundane reality reinstating the past "that time had seemed to have taken." The light of eternity shines through the vacant lot of the "empty and brutal" present, the dead dog rises to life again, and then, as a final cause of the inspiration, the poet meets and addresses his father: "... You haven't / changed much since you died" (*PP* 68–73).

Nabokov seems to hint at "Evening on a Vacant Lot" as an important auto-source and subtext of *The Gift* when Fyodor, on his way to the Grunewald forest and, hence, to his inspiration, passes by a small villa that was being built "*on yesterday's vacant lot*, . . . and since the *sky* was looking through the gaps of future *windows*, and since burdocks and *sunlight* had taken advantage of the slowness of the work to make themselves comfortable within the unfinished white walls, these had acquired the pensive cast of ruins, like the word 'sometime,' which serves both the past and the future" (329; italics added). Since numerous house-building images in *The Gift* (and, for that matter, in many other of Nabokov's novels and short stories) are persistently encoded as metaliterary metaphors describing the very process of writing a text, it would not be preposterous to suppose that the villa being built on "yesterday's vacant lot" denotes the novel itself growing out of yesterday's poem and, therefore, out of the author's personal experience.

At any rate, obvious correspondences between "Evening on a Vacant Lot" and *The Gift* suggest that we do have sufficient reasons to think of Fyodor as the author's alter ego in certain respects. But even when the hero seems to

mirror the most personal feelings and memories of the writer—for example, his deep grief at his father's death, his remembrance of a paradisiac home and lost homeland, his anxiety about "the gloom and the glory of exile"—Nabokov shifts emphasis from the temporal aspects of experience to the atemporality of the artistic response. For him, exile, separation, and bereavement are inherent conditions of human existence in time, and what distinguishes genuine artists is not the extreme agony of their private losses (after all, the misfortune of the Chernyshevskis who have lost their only son is not less tragic than that of Fyodor) but an entelechy of creative consciousness *per se* that allows them to cope with accidental calamities of history and biography. That is why *The Gift* excludes any autobiographical *master-plot*, any *sequence of events* that could be connected with some extratextual chronology. Instead, the hero assumes the dimensions of the authorial double only at those rare moments of "cosmic synchronization" when he sheds his mundane persona, steps out of the here and now, and "abandons himself to all the demands of inspiration" (56).

For that matter *The Gift* breaks with central tenets of the modern autobiographical *Künstlerroman*, in which, as Bakhtin showed, "man's individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence" and "accomplished in real historical time, with all of its necessity, its fullness, its future, and its profoundly chronotopic nature."[69] Contrary to Bakhtin's pronouncements, historical time in *The Gift* has neither fullness nor reality; it is parodically represented as a hodgepodge of incongruous, anachronistic, disparate events (50; cf. also 248) that make headlines but are of no importance to an artist. Characteristically, it is Zina's stepfather Shchyogolev, a personification of stupidity and *poshlost'*, who tries to "explain and foresee a multitude of world events" (160), while to Fyodor "so-called politics (that ridiculous sequence of pacts, conflicts, aggravations, frictions, discords, collapses, and the transformation of perfectly innocent little towns into the names of international treaties) meant nothing" (36). Nabokov's hero claims immunity from any socio-historical, political, or economic factors; he treats them as irrelevant, empty abstractions, "a hundredfold more spectral than the most abstract dream" (36), as a superficial quasi-reality that reproduces itself again and again in vicious cycles.

In Nabokov's view, a genuine artist does not care about history because his emergence is an autogeneous, organic process resistant to historical pressures; all the gifts the writer himself received and, in his turn, bestowed upon Fyodor—an extraordinary acuteness of sensory perception, especially of vision, a brilliant memory, synesthesia, a hermeneutic awareness, a combinatorial ingenuity—develop independently of external influences into the powerful tools of an individual creative imagination that defies time and "searches beyond barricades (of words, of senses, of the world) for infinity, where all, all the lines meet" (329).

In the second imaginary conversation with Koncheyev, Fyodor rejects the traditional notion of time as "a kind of growth" and propounds the theory

(though he calls it "as hopeless a finite hypothesis as all the others") that "there is no time, that everything is the present situated like a radiance beyond our blindness" (342). Our finiteness, however, shuts out all possibility of looking through the walleye of time except during brief and rare moments of insight. Thus his love for Zina makes Fyodor feel "the strangeness of life, the strangeness of its magic, as if *a corner of it had been turned back for an instant and he had glimpsed its unusual lining*" (183; italics added). A similar metaphor describes the opposite experience when the hero confronts death rather than love: ". . . with a kind of relief—as if the responsibility for his soul belonged not to him but to someone who knew what it all meant—he felt that all this skein of random thoughts, like everything else as well—the seams and sleaziness of the spring day, the ruffle of the air, the coarse, variously intercrossing threads of confused sounds—was but *the reverse side of a magnificent fabric, on the front of which there gradually formed and became alive images invisible to him*" (314; italics added). In both cases the dichotomy between life-in-time and the eternal present is expressed through the imagery of a fabric,[70] but the position of the viewer and his perception are quite different: while the epiphany through love reveals in human fate some transcendental, benevolent order and meaning hidden under the fabric of existence, the epiphany through death leaves one trapped in time as if on the underside of a tapestry being woven by a supreme artificer, a tiny part of his design that remains incomprehensible and invisible from our mundane reality.

If Fyodor acquiesces in this Platonic impasse without even a tinge of existential despair, it is for the reason that he knows how to escape from it by creating new "magnificent fabrics" and experiencing the ultimate freedom of an artificer in his own right. When the design of a new text springs up in the mind of a writer, explained Nabokov in his essay "The Art of Literature and Commonsense," "the past and the present *and* the future (your book) . . . come together in a sudden flash; thus the entire circle of time is perceived, which is another way of saying that time ceases to exist. It is a combined sensation of having the whole universe entering you and of yourself wholly dissolving in the universe surrounding you. It is the prison wall of the ego suddenly crumbling away with the nonego rushing in from the outside to save the prisoner—who is already dancing in the open" (*LL* 378). Even afterwards, when the writer settles down to the actual composing of his book, "time and sequence cannot exist in the author's mind because no time element and no space element had ruled the initial vision." Thus, the ideal way to read a text is to behold it in its entirety, as a purely spatial form, "without the absurdity of beginnings and ends . . . for thus the author saw it at the moment of its conception" (*LL* 380). On the other hand, with respect to characters existing in a created reality, the author's atemporal vision is situated "like a radiance beyond their blindness"—at the very best they can retroactively catch some fatidic pattern in their past and thereby achieve the level of a reader who has not yet finished the book; but

the full knowledge encompassing "the whole circle of time" lies beyond their grasp.

The paradox of *The Gift* is that its hero combines all the limitations of a character with the prerogatives of a reader and even an author, and thus, respectively, functions at three cognitive levels. As far as he exists within the present of the narrated time, Fyodor, in spite of his hermeneutic talents, is unable to apprehend the unfolding text of his life: the very temporality cannot but blur his perception, and he often overlooks opportunities, passes by hints and prompts left for him by the cunning author, does not notice meaningful connections between various facts, misinterprets or underinterprets "signs and symbols" surrounding him, and easily falls for authorial deceptions and pranks. For example, in Chapter One of the novel Fyodor ignores the offer of work by the lawyer Charski (to help an unknown Russian girl translate some documents from German), and misses his early chance to meet Zina (69–70) because he fails to appreciate the Pushkinian parallels of the incident. It is hardly a coincidence that this "middleman of fate" (Charski) has the same name as a character in Pushkin's "Egyptian Nights" (an unfinished tale to which Fyodor will allude later, in his *Life of Chernyshevski*): after all, each of them acts as a patron to a poor artist in exile and tries to help his protégé earn some money. Moreover, Nabokov's Charski makes his offer at a literary meeting, during the debut of Herman Ivanovich Busch, a Russified German with "farcical accent and bizarre solecisms," who is reading his new "philosophical tragedy"—a parodic echo of the recital scene in "Egyptian Nights" conjoined with a hint at Hermann, the hero of Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades." And though Busch's play turns out to be a wretched, obscure jumble, a laughingstock for its audience, its fragments inserted into the narration sound like a secret message addressed to the heedless hero, a commentary on his not noticing his future wife[71]: "All is fate. [. . .] Yes, the fortuneteller told me that my daughter would marry yesterday's passerby [. . .] Oh, I did not even notice him. [. . .] And he did not notice her" (67–68).

It is only natural that from his temporal position, without any knowledge of the future, Fyodor is unable to decipher smudged signals lurking in the chaos of immediate reality. "The following of . . . thematic designs through one's life" (*SM* 27) as Nabokov put it, requires some distance, some time lag necessary for retrospective semiosis. Throughout the novel Fyodor tries again and again to recapture or, better, to re-read his past, to discover in it a coherent system of meanings, and by the very end of the narrated time he reaches the point when he can look backwards at the recent period of his life (that is, at the time-span of *The Gift* itself) as at a distanced object of aesthetic contemplation. In the final conversation with Zina he tells her that now, in retrospect, he understands "destiny's work" and discusses three attempts of fate to bring them together: the first two crude and unsuccessful, the last one based on deception and therefore artistically perfect. But even such a gifted reader-critic of his own life as Fyodor would never achieve the totality of non-temporal perception and

control accessible only to the implied creator: shackled by time and space, one is inexorably doomed to blunder, to make wrong guesses, to forget important details, to skip cross-references and interconnections. From a distance of more than three years Fyodor cannot find a link between a swaying stalk of grass in Grunewald (". . . where had this happened before," he thinks, "what had straightened up and started to *sway*" [344; italics added]) and a scene that "jolted him" in the very beginning of the novel: "As he crossed toward the pharmacy at the corner he involuntarily turned his head because of a burst of light that ricocheted from his temple, and saw, with that quick smile with which we greet a rainbow or a rose, a blindingly white parallelogram of sky being unloaded from the van—a dresser with mirror across which, as across a cinema screen, passed a flawlessly clear reflection of boughs sliding and *swaying* not arboreally, but with a human vacillation, produced by the nature of those who were carrying this sky, these boughs, this gliding facade" (6; italics added). The hero will forget this elegant parable of poetic representation—a *displaced* and *upturned* mirror[72] that reflects, first and foremost, the curtained mind of the creator (the sun, the primary source of light, is covered by clouds) and, then, fragments of reality it selects, frames, and harmonizes—and won't recognize its strong echoes in the epiphanic Grunewald scenes with their accentuated symbolism of sunlight, clouds, and greenery. The hidden pattern, though, is there: it reveals itself when Fyodor, lying on his back in the grass, exactly like the mirror, starts to reflect the sky and the boughs "from the point of *upturned vision*," and the movement of foliage reminds him of "algae *swaying* in transparent water" (332; italics added).

So Fyodor may criticize "destiny's work" for staging the "moving of furniture" extravaganza, which, to his taste, was too crude and lacked subtlety; in fact, it is his "reading" that is unavoidably crude and flawed. Lapses of memory and failures of both hindsight and foresight undermine his version of the past.[73] Under closer scrutiny it turns out to be no more than a rough and incomplete outline of the design, its partial projection upon a time axis representing the circular three-dimensional structure in terms of a linear plot.

The hero's imperfect exegesis of his life's scripture as "destiny's work," however, is good enough to trigger his own creative imagination: "Pondering now fate's methods . . . he finally found a certain thread, a hidden spirit, a chess idea for his as yet hardly planned 'novel'" (363). His idea is *not* to reconstruct a complex pattern interweaving the past, the present, and the future (by definition, it is impossible for a character and a first-time reader situated on the wrong side of the fabric) but to *use basic structural principles* he has learned through personal experience in a creation of his own. In contrast to such blunderers as Luzhin (*The Defense*), Smurov (*The Eye*), Hermann (*Despair*), or Humbert Humbert (*Lolita*), Fyodor knows and respects the cardinal difference between life and art, and never tries to project his ego upon the medium he is not responsible for. According to Nabokov, to gain control over a reality means to create it from A to Z—first "in a stellar explosion of the mind" (*LL*

379), and then in harnessing a chosen medium, or, for a writer, in "reaching a final dictatorship over words" that "are trying to vote," as Fyodor puts it. Whether he is composing his poems, or chess problems, whether he is imagining himself in Tibet side by side with his father, or Chernyshevski in Siberian exile, whether he is dissolving under the sun of Grunewald ready for a plunge into the universe of his future books, the hero of *The Gift* always feels the same genuine inspiration—"a momentary dream of soul" (212), "a divine excitement" (153), that delivers him from the prison of time and space, and translates his consciousness to the authorial level. And though we part from him on the verge of his greater achievements, when, in his own judgement, he has not yet completely tamed his medium, the highest artistic standards he sets for himself and all his previous progress leave no doubt that Fyodor is destined to "write something huge to make everyone gasp" (194).

There is a direct correspondence between the three cognitive levels reached by the hero in the novel and the three distinct narrative modes that are identified by the marked temporal position of a narrator:[74] 1) First-person narration from within the narrated time, a kind of interior monologue that reflects Fyodor's thoughts, impressions, and reminiscences at a fixed moment of his present. In this case the temporal position of the narrator is defined either by an appropriate grammatical tense or by such phrases as, for instance, "I emigrated seven years ago" (17) and "I lived here exactly two years" (144), which refer to the internal chronology of the novel. 2) First-person narration from some future point with respect to the narrated present, a version of Fyodor's memoirs or autobiographical notes that, by inference, could be composed only beyond the time-frame of the novel. The most conspicuous example of this mode is the hero's description of his wanderings in Grunewald beginning with the phrase "The forest as I found it was still alive, rich, full of birds" (330), which establishes a distance between a time of narrating and that of the novel's ending. 3) Various types of authorial omniscient narration that encompass and transcend the linear time of the text insofar as they represent the non-temporal position of the creative consciousness, or, in the words of the novel, the point of view that is "everywhere and nowhere" (306).

The authorial consciousness, the sun of this created universe, is free to don whatever narratorial mask it thinks expedient for its design (cf. Fyodor feeling "the sun's hot mask on his upturned face" [329]). Thus, in the unfinished book about his father Fyodor is experimenting with shifts from the detached "I" of a biographer and memoirist to a "we" incorporating the subjective viewer and his object, and to the second "I" wholly immersed in the recreated reality, adding to them the voice of the fictitious narrator (A.N. Suhoshchokov); in his *Life of Chernyshevski* he again uses a first-person narration combined with "quotes" from a fictitious source (Strannolyubski), but constructs his "I-mask" in a new way. Now it is an ironic, playful voice of a sovereign artificer who enjoys complete control over his writing: "I have tamed its themes, they have become accustomed to my pen; with a smile I let them go: in the course of

development they merely describe a circle, like a boomerang or a falcon, in order to end by returning to my hand; and even if any should fly far away, beyond the horizon of my page, I am not perturbed; it will fly back, just as this one has done" (236–37).

In contrast to the inserted pieces, the authorial narration in the main part of *The Gift* is predominantly impersonal, and its point of view approaches that of Fyodor. However, now and then the impersonal narrator diverges from the chosen mode and suddenly distances himself from the hero either by zooming away in time (cf.: "*In those days* Berlin janitors were for the most part opulent bullies . . ." [54; italics added]), or by providing an anticipatory, proleptic comment (cf.: ". . . Fyodor kept pondering over the fact that the misfortune of the Chernyshevskis appeared to be a kind of mocking variation on the theme of his own hope-suffused grief, and *only much later did he understand* the full refinement of the corollary . . ." [92; italics added]). There are also two instances when the implied author reminds one of his presence in parodic asides addressed directly to readers (144, 331), and in the latter case even transmogrifies himself into an "I" when he asks them to enter the world of the novel from the other end: "Give *me* your hand, dear reader, and let's go into the forest together [italics added]."

Such unexpected breaches in the smooth flow of impersonal narration serve as signals that "lay bare the device" and shift the emphasis from the hero to the mystery of his creator, from the object of narration to its generating subject. Like Fyodor's *Life of Chernyshevski*, *The Gift* proper abounds in metaliterary comments describing the structure of the text and rules of its composition and reading, though here they are not presented in the form of open authorial remarks but are camouflaged in seemingly realistic portrayals. Almost any detail of the novel's landscape—a piece of furniture, a building, a street, a square, a forest, a gate, a tram, a fence, a toy—may be reinterpreted, without losing its direct referential meaning, as a metonymy of the novel itself, a variation on its central theme: the interrelation between Art and Life. One example from Chapter Two will suffice. Fyodor is in a tramcar on his way to his tutorials and suddenly makes up his mind to play truant: ". . . he jumped out and strode across the slippery square to another tramline on which, by cheating, he could return to his own district on the same ticket—good for one transfer but not at all for a return journey; but [. . .] knowing the routes, one could turn a straight journey imperceptibly into an arc, bending back to the point of departure. This clever system . . . was willingly followed by Fyodor; from absentmindedness however, from an incapacity to cherish a material advantage for any length of time, and already thinking of something else, he paid automatically for the new ticket he had intended to save on" (84–85). This tongue-in-cheek description not only anticipates the subsequent mental return of Fyodor to the garden of his childhood or the ring form of his *Life of Chernyshevski*, which is composed like "a continuously curving, and thus infinite sentence" (204), but also recapitulates the circular structure of *The Gift*

as a whole— the "clever system" with its hardly perceptible arcs of motifs "bending back to the point of departure" and its final "cheating" that subverts a linear plot and sends a reader (together with the hero) back to the very beginning of the narration. It is through such double- and even triple-edged descriptions that the authorial consciousness reveals its presence in the text and makes its claim to absolute power over textual space and time.

As we have seen, many critics tend to identify this all-powerful authorial consciousness with that of Fyodor who, in their view, by the finale of the novel has reached full creative maturity and slipped from one side of the narrative Möbius strip to another. His revelation in Grunewald and subsequent promise to write a novel in which the central theme of fate will be "built up, curtained, surrounded by dense life—my life, my professional passions and cares" (364) do set up a code for rereading *The Gift* as Fyodor's future book written after years of preparatory work and telling, so to say, its own autobiography. The problem, however, is that at the end of the *second* reading we cannot but come to the conclusion that the alleged transformation of the character into the author was just another intended and programmed deception, and that we have to find some new code in order to reread the novel for the *third* time. Given Fyodor's aesthetic principles (not only professed but fully realized in the text) and his progress from representation to "alchemic distillation" and transfiguration of personal experience; and given his vows to be true only to fiction and "to shuffle, twist, mix, rechew and rebelch everything" in his future portrait of himself as an artist, the second reading based on the presumed identity of the hero with the author questions and negates this very presumption.

It turns out that Fyodor *cannot* be the author of the text we are rereading whether we regard it as a "truthful" representation of his "real" experience or as a "fiction." If the story of Fyodor's life and art is "truth," then, with respect to his creative consciousness it is no more than *"material"* which will be later transformed beyond recognition into a new imagined reality of his novel. Since we are not allowed to see what images start to grow on the blank side of a Möbius strip at the moment when Fyodor "dissolves completely" and leaves it for the other side, his book remains a potentiality, that very "shadow" extending "beyond the skyline of the page" (366) the author mentions in his Pushkinian coda to *The Gift*. Its characters and their life stories, its setting and imagery, its phraseology and vocabulary—in other words, its texture—lie beyond our reach, in a "locked room" of Fyodor's virtual mind, and the only thing about them we know for sure is that they will be different from those of the novel we have read. But at the same time, because we have enough knowledge of *how* his creative mind perceives and reshapes the world, the absence of texture does not bar us from visualizing the structure and thematic patterns of the non-existent book and discovering that the latter and *The Gift* must be isomorphic.

If, on the other hand, we read the novel as "fiction," it means that we lose access (or, in Nabokov's metaphor, the keys) to its "material," which has been obliterated in the process of "alchemic distillation"—to that experiential reality of its author who, therefore, turns into a "Person Unknown" devoid of any name or biography, of any attributes but those belonging to the essence of his creative consciousness. With respect to the finite fictional world, he is its first and final cause, a puppeteer whose "colossal hand" appears now and then "for an instant among the creatures whose size the eye had come to accept" (10), an eternal, omnipotent, anonymous and invisible Deity creating the hero in His own image. Like Fyodor–the writer hiding behind the narrative masks of his fictitious colleagues—Suhoshchokov, Strannolyubski, Delalande—the author of *The Gift* may masquerade as "Fyodor–the writer" or "Fyodor–the character," but his own momentary intrusions into the text lay bare the deception and assert his sovereignty over the fiction.

At the level of narration the presence of the *third*, supreme point of view (*not Fyodor's*!) is indicated by the narrator's recurrent usage of the first-person *plural* "we," which refers to the hero together with the "Person Unknown," and emphasizes both their kinship and their separateness (an obvious echo of the "we" in Fyodor's writings, where it joined the father with the son as well as the narrator with his character). The plural pronoun unexpectedly turns up in the narration when Fyodor is taking a look at his future lodgings: ". . . there froze before *us* a small oblong room . . ." (143; italics added); when he is watching "a pair of charming silk legs"—"*we* know of course that this has been worn threadbare by the efforts of a thousand male writers, but nevertheless down they came, these legs—and deceived" (163; italics added); when he is reading Gogol's letters: "But *we* are reading and *we* will keep on reading" (192; italics added), or when he is walking home on the day of Gogol's birthday (Nabokov's favorite April the first): "Here at last is the square where *we* dined and the tall brick church and the still quite transparent poplar . . ." (53; italics added), etc.

Especially important is the latter instance because critics have usually interpreted it as a proleptic allusion by the hero to "the book's closing scene in that same square where Fyodor and Zina have dinner and he first tells her his conception of *The Gift*,"[75] and, hence, a proof of the narrator's identity with Fyodor's creative consciousness. A closer look at the novel's topography, however, shows beyond any doubt that the square Fyodor passes in Chapter One (its constant markers are the tall brick church, the gigantic poplar, the public toilet and the small public garden with chestnuts and lilacs) and a plaza with "a *treeless* public garden consisting of a large oblong flower-bed" and "the small, open enclosure of a restaurant" where Fyodor and Zina will dine on mashed potato and beer in the closing scene of the novel have nothing in common, and that the narrator, therefore, intends a different dinner and a different pair. The phrase in question alludes not to the character's distant future, but to his immediate past—to a *previous* scene in which Fyodor quickly

ate four "piroshkis" on "a damp bench in a small public garden" (his only dinner of the day!) on the same square near his new house (30), and as he had his meal alone, "we" in this context can only refer to the "he" of the hero and "I" of his author—his invisible creator and protector, his "Lone Companion" whose consciousness, though hidden from view, is responsible for Fyodor's fate.

The authorial "I" finally separates from both the "He" and "I" of the hero only in the last paragraph of the novel, when the narrator suddenly changes his tone, borrows Pushkin's stanza, meters and voice, and in person reclaims the entire book as his sole property: "Good-by, *my* book! [. . .] no obstruction for the sage exists where *I* have put The End: the shadows of *my* world extend beyond the skyline of the page" (366; italics added). This rhymed *Onegin* stanza in a thin disguise of prose not only sets new codes for rereading *The Gift* and sends us back to its beginning, but also points towards an important connection of Nabokov's narrative design with that in Pushkin's novel, where the authorial persona builds an ambivalent relationship with the protagonist, at times merging with him into a brotherly "we," at others emphasizing a clear-cut line of demarcation.

In his essay "Writer, Hero, Poet," published in 1936, Khodasevich compared the relationship between Pushkin and Onegin to a circle circumscribing a polygon: there are some points the hero shares with the writer but they can never be congruent, just as the area of a polygon will never be equal to that of a circle.[76] If we apply Khodasevich's mathematical analogues to *The Gift*, we can see that Nabokov has drastically modified and complicated the initial Pushkinian formula by endowing his protagonist with a creative capacity and thereby objectifying the split of "Writer" into "Poet" and "Hero." Fyodor's mind then can be compared to a circle within a larger concentric circle (of course, with its own inscribed polygons), and through his eyes the writer contemplates not so much his life as his own creative consciousness—or, better, the irreducible center, the core of this consciousness, *the most valuable gift* that is inherent in all genuine creators, be they living or dead, real or imagined, humans or gods. In contrast to Khodasevich, Nabokov associates creativity with *agape* rather than demonic forces. "My personal I, the one that wrote books, the one that loved words, colors, mental fireworks, Russia, chocolate and Zina"—that is how Fyodor defines the emerging "Poet" within himself. "What I am saying is in fact a kind of declaration of love" (364), he tells Zina after having confided the secret of his future novel to her. In this sense *The Gift* itself can be called "a kind of declaration of love"—love of the creator for his creature, and of the creature for its creator, love of a son for his father, love of an exile for his native land, love for language and those who love it, love for the beauty of the world, and, last but not least, love for its readers. Let us turn to *The Gift*.

Alexander Dolinin

NOTES

1. Nabokov, *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*, p. 254.
2. Boyd, 1990, pp. 397, 446.
3. Nabokov, *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*, p. 254.
4. Connolly, 1992, pp. 185–96.
5. Vishniak, pp. 254–55, note.
6. Khodasevich, "Knigi i liudi" in *Vozrozhdenie*, issues for 15 May and 15 October 1937; and 25 February, 24 June, and 11 November 1938.
7. Zaitsev, pp. 147–48.
8. Bunin, p. 179.
9. Andreev, 1954, p. 157.
10. Tammi, 1985, p. 82.
11. Lee, 1976, p. 81.
12. See Salehar; Field, 1967, and others.
13. See Hyde; Lee, 1976; Duffield White; Toker, 1989; Boyd, 1990.
14. Davydov, 1985, pp. 369–70.
15. See Rampton, 1984, pp. 64–100.
16. Paperno, "How Nabokov's *Gift* Is Made," pp. 309 et passim. An affinity between *The Gift* and Russian Formalism (as well as Iury Olesha, the most prominent Soviet disciple of the Formalists) was also discussed by E. Brown.
17. D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 93–107; Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 108–36.
18. Ronen, p. 378.
19. See Davydov, *Teksty-Matreshki*, pp. 194–99; Connolly, 1992, p. 218; Toker, 1989, pp. 159–61. In the latter work, the Möbius strip analogy is rejected and replaced by the figure of a receding spiral with narrowing gyres. D. Barton Johnson writes about the "ring structure with self-contained spiralling thematic nodes" that resembles "the form of the legendary snake swallowing its own tail" (*Worlds in Regression*, p. 95).
20. Salehar, p. 70.
21. Levin, 1981, p. 205.
22. Tammi, 1985, pp. 92, 96–97. Among other examples, Tammi draws attention to an episode at a railway station in Chapter Five which could not have been witnessed by Fyodor who is waiting for Zina outside (359–60).
23. Connolly, 1992, p. 217.
24. See Boyd, 1990, p. 480.
25. Malmstad, p. 317.
26. Berberova, 1972, p. 369; cf. Berberova, 1992, p. 567.
27. See Dark, "Primechaniia," pp. 463–64.
28. *Eugene Onegin*, II, p. 229.
29. The "gift" of the title has several meanings in the context of the novel, and this is just one of them. It dialogically responds to Pushkin's famous poem "Dar naprasnyi, dar sluchainyi" ("A gift of no use, a gift capricious, Oh, life, why have you been given to me?"), and develops Khodasevich's lines from "Gorit zvezda, drozhit efir" ("A star shines, the air trembles"): "How can I not love this world, Thy unbelievable gift!"
30. See Osorgin's review of *Chisla* in *Sovremennye zapiski*, no. 46, 1931, pp. 505–508.
31. Cf., for instance, Weidle, 1934, p. 57, or Fedotov, p. 147.

32. See also Fedotov, p. 148. It is interesting that in February 1936 Nabokov was present at Fedotov's talk in Paris on sanctity and creativity. See *Novyi grad*, no. 11, 1936, p. 142.
33. Poplavsky, 1930, p. 308.
34. On this controversy, see also Hagglund, 1976, and Davydov, 1992.
35. Adamovich, "Kommentarii (prodolzhenie)," pp. 167–69.
36. Poplavsky, 1930–31, p. 171; Poplavsky, 1930, pp. 309–10.
37. Adamovich, "Kommentarii," pp. 142–43.
38. Nabokov's polemics were directed against a widely-spread premise going back to Romantics and Symbolists that language is an inadequate tool for expressing the ultimate mysteries of being, because, in Tiutchev's words, "an uttered thought is a lie." In February 1936 Nabokov took part in a public discussion of a paper by Berdiaev, in which the famous philosopher condemned the distrust of Logos and thought that were traditional, in his view, for the "Russian soul." See *Novyi grad*, no. 11, 1936, pp. 140–42.
39. Poplavsky, 1930, p. 311.
40. Cf. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 207. The most plausible reason for Svidrigailov's appearance at the funeral of Alexander Chernyshevski is that both of them had been visited by ghosts, which is also intertwined with parodically related references to America (*Gift* 310; *Crime and Punishment*, p. 244).
41. Karlinsky, 1963, p. 286.
42. Cf. Pushkin, 1992, p. 16. In the Russian original there are no quotation marks, and the only deviation from Pushkin's text is the change of "I" into "he."
43. See Dolinin, 1990, pp. 634–35; and Paperno, "How Nabokov's *Gift* Is Made," pp. 299–300.
44. E.g.: ". . . said Fyodor, *who during this tirade* (as Turgenev, Goncharov, Count Salias, Grigorovich and Boborykin used to write) had been nodding his head with an approving *mien*" (340; the italics are Nabokov's; the underscoring is added).
45. *Volia Rossii*, no. 7/9, 1931, pp. 282–84.
46. *Sovremennye zapiski*, no. 61, 1936, pp. 409–14.
47. *Sovremennye zapiski*, no. 60, 1936, pp. 404–408.
48. *Novyi grad*, no. 10, 1935, pp. 12–28. Some parodic echoes of Stepun's argument can be found in Professor Anuchin's review of Fyodor's *Life of Chernyshevski* in Chapter Five of *The Gift* (317–19).
49. Khodasevich, 1991, pp. 466–72.
50. It is worth noting that in Russian the name "Delaland" contains the anagram of Daedalus—a possible allusion both to Joyce's hero–artist, the obvious rival of Nabokov's Fyodor, and to his mythological prototype, the inventor of wings with which he escaped exile. This suggestion is supported, among other things, by the development of a wing motif in the novel (96, 115, 331, 334, 362). Apart from Daedalus, the name of the fictitious "French sage" points to the real 18th-century French astronomer Laland, described in Karamzin's *Letters of a Russian Traveller* as "a sage" who "forgot the earthly for the sake of the skies and discovered scores of new stars" (Karamzin, p. 351). It is through the mask of Delalande that Fyodor tries to verbalize his metaphysical "sense of the starry sky" (164)—i.e., a sense of eternity; and the recurrent image of stars in the novel is associated with immortality, poetic inspiration, love and the other world (see, for instance, 118–19, 153, 156, 177, 178, 366).

51. Nabokov makes fun of Remizov's ornamental narrative style that was imitated by a number of young Soviet writers of the 1920s. See, for example, Vladimir Lidin's *Povesti o mnogikh dniakh* (*Stories of Many Days*, 1923) and *Shestaia dver'* (*The Sixth Door*, 1923), which abound in pretentious inversions like "years blizzardy, days columbine-milky, nights fluffy and gypsyish," etc.
52. See Malmsta.
53. In a review of Shmelev's book *Rodnoe* (*Dear Homeland*) Adamovich derisively quoted a passage from his tale in which a Russian man returns home from abroad and goes into raptures over the glorious native *shir'*, which, in his words, is out of any foreigner's depth (see *Sovremennye zapiski*, no. 49, 1932, pp. 454–55).
54. Quoted in Boyd, 1990, p. 480.
55. Cf. Nabokov's statement in an interview: "Everything that can be profitably said about Count Godunov-Cherdyntsev's biography of Chernyshevski has been said by Koncheyev in *The Gift*" (*SO* 65).
56. Cf. Mandelshtam's poem "Rakovina" ("A Conch"), and the image of a conch holding "distant noises" of eternity in Khodasevich's poem "Dusha" ("The Soul").
57. See Nabokov's review of two poets, Dmitry Kobiakov and Evgeny Shakh, in *Rul'*, 11 May 1927.
58. *Nash vek*, 31 January 1932.
59. Cf. also Nabokov's lampooning "titles like *Third Love*, *The Sixth Sense*, and *Point Seventeen*" (*Gift* 167).
60. Temiriazev, pp. 178–80.
61. Beaten and trampled prostitutes appear in Ianovsky's *Mir* (pp. 146–47) and in his sensationally brutal story "Trinadtsatye" ("The Thirteens") published in *Chisla*, no. 2/3, 1930, pp. 129–35.
62. Boyd, 1990, p. 463.
63. The autobiographical prose of Tolstoy and Bunin forms the core of the literary tradition from which *The Gift* both derives and departs. With this in view, it is highly relevant that in the very first phrase of the novel the narrator parodies and comments on the "peculiar honesty" of Russian authors who omit the final digit when beginning their books with a date, as the best known example of such an omission is the opening of Tolstoy's *Childhood*. On the other hand, Bunin is the last Russian writer alluded to in *The Gift* (see 349).
64. Quoted in Boyd, 1990, p. 239.
65. *Rul'*, 7 January 1923 (the Russian Christmas issue).
66. Weidle, 1931, pp. 491–95.
67. This gloss (*Gift* 7) is absent from the Russian original where the meaning of the name becomes even more obvious in Fyodor's dream of his father's return (chapter 5): instead of the correct "Klara," Frau Stoboy is alluded to as "Egda" and thereby her full name forms a truncated Russian phrase "[vs]egda s toboi"—"always with you."
68. For a more detailed discussion of these scenes on similar lines, see Connolly, 1992, pp. 211–14.
69. Bakhtin, 1986, p. 23.
70. Cf. the same image in Khodasevich's poem "Bez slov" ("Without Words"). Its speaker, writes David Bethea, "tells how his mistress [. . .] has silently presented him with a well-stitched seam sewn along white cambric. Then, building on this homely conceit, he goes on to compare his life to a series of stitches woven along the light fabric of existence by the nimble hand of God. In the end he turns the fabric over and sees how

the stitchwork on one side—the pattern of his life—and the stitchwork on the other—the pattern of his death—are interwoven" (Bethea, p. 157).

71. In the context of *The Gift,* Busch, not unlike Mr. Silbermann in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* serves as an agent of the author in a disguise of a foolish clown (hence his circus name alluding to the famous Busch circus in Berlin).
72. Cf. Fyodor's programmatic statement: ". . . any genuinely new trend [in art] is a knight's move, a change of shadows, a shift that displaces the mirror" (239).
73. The most obvious mistake Fyodor makes is connected, of course, with the key-lock-room motif: insentient to its fatidic recurrence at all the turning points in his past that he discusses with Zina, the hero does not notice that it has resurfaced again in his present situation and, therefore, that he will be caught unawares by the parting prank of fate, which leaves the lovers locked out on the street without the keys to their apartment.
74. In this connection it is noteworthy that the number three, as a rule, appears in those parts of the novel that can be interpreted as meta-poetic metaphors describing its own narrative structure (e. g., 4–6, 7, 328, 329, 343, etc.).
75. D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression,* p. 97; see also Toker, 1989, p. 160, and Connolly, 1992, p. 217.
76. Khodasevich, "Avtor, geroi, poet," pp. 168–71.

GLORY

Although *Glory* (*Podvig*, 1932) was the last of Nabokov's Russian novels to be translated into English,[1] it was not regarded unkindly by the author. In an interview recorded in 1971 when the English text was at the printers, Nabokov rated *Glory* his "third best" Russian novel (after *The Gift* and *Invitation to a Beheading*).[2] In another interview, he singled out the hero of *Glory* as one of his "favorite creatures, [his] resplendent characters" (*SO* 193). It is also a measure of the author's esteem for his early work that, unlike some other Nabokovian auto-translations, the English version does not vary substantially from its original. As Nabokov confirms, the translation is "meticulously true to the [Russian] text" (ix).[3]

In part, the author's protective attitude may have been due to the tepid critical reception of this novel. Upon its initial appearance, *Glory* was greeted by the émigré critics with grudging praise for its "technical" dexterity and hoots for an apparent lack of content. The reviewer of the Paris-based journal *Chisla* complained: "What amazes us more than anything else in [Nabokov] is the all but oppressive wealth of physiological vitality. Everything is exceptionally lush and colorful, and somewhat pinguid. But behind this extensive overflow, there is a void. Not an abyss, but a void, like an emptiness that reigns over a shoal—frightening expressly for the absence of depth."[4] In an identical vein, another reviewer in the Paris paper *Poslednie novosti* wrote that while *Glory* was "written

with brilliance and convincing formal mastery" it nonetheless "somewhat frightens [the reader] with its inner irrelevance."[5] (For other samples of Nabokov's reception in Russian émigré criticism, see L. Foster, 1972; Dark, "Zagadka Sirina.")

Neither has the novel fared much better in latter-day criticism. Reviewing the English translation, John Updike—a friendly reader—suggested diplomatically that "*Glory* never really awakens to its condition as a novel."[6] And presumably such misgivings are shared by many critics specializing on Nabokov, as scholarship on *Glory* is sparse (save insightful chapters in the recent works by Toker, 1989, and Boyd, 1990; some overlappings between these studies and the present one cannot be avoided).[7]

In what follows, it will not be necessary to re-evaluate *Glory*. Whether the novel is Nabokov's "third best" or not is a matter of taste. But it is of more interest to notice how closely *Glory* fits into the Nabokovian canon and how it develops the thematic and structural possibilities inherent in the author's other works. This article will first examine some thematic continuities and then move on to narrative structure. The final remarks will touch upon the question of metaphysics in the novel.

Cambridge

Critical hindsight allows the present-day reader of *Glory* to see it, first of all, as a central text in the series of Nabokovian works devoted to the theme of studying at an English university. Martin Edelweiss, the hero of *Glory*, is a Russian expatriate enrolled at Cambridge in the early twenties, and roughly one third of the narrative is set in England. Some of these episodes had already been sketched by Nabokov in such early texts as the essay "Kembridzh" ("Cambridge") (1921),[8] which gave his own impressions of England, as well as in the Russian poems (with English titles) "Football" (1920) and "Biology" (1923). Martin's goalkeeping figures as a small theme in its own right in *Glory* (110–11), and he first considers taking up biological studies (61). Aptly, his best friend at Cambridge is named Darwin (a "simian name" [68]).

On a larger scale, this theme was taken up in the sixty-three stanza *Universitetskaia poema* (*The University Poem*) (1927), where the speaker spends his days peering into "the bright well of the microscope" (p. 228) and a decade later in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*—Knight studies at Cambridge—and *The Gift*, where it is the writer Vladimirov who "had studied . . . at an English university" (321).[9]

Only *after* these works had been written, Nabokov returned to the university theme in *Speak, Memory*. Here he recounts his own memories of Cambridge from 1919–22, and the reader encounters again the motifs of "the goalie's eccentric art" (267); "the radiant bottom of a microscope's magic shaft" (166); as well as such incidents migrating from one work to another as finding Dahl's Russian *Dictionary* at a Cambridge bookstall (265);[10] making the

chimney draw with a sheet of the *Times* (266–67);[11] or listening to the newsboys shouting "Piper, piper!" (269).[12]

It is a well-known device in Nabokov to weave motifs and "thematic designs" (*SM* 27) from one text to another. Still, it is hardly accurate to claim that, besides *Glory*, "there is no other Nabokov work which repeats so frequently and precisely incidents from *Speak, Memory*."[13] Most of these incidents were *first* recorded in fiction and—true to the spirit of continuity governing Nabokov's total opus—recycled only afterwards in the autobiography (and once more in the auto-parodic *Look at the Harlequins!*, where Vadim concludes his studies at Cambridge the same year—1922—as his creator, one year before Martin).[14]

The Return to Russia

There are other designs knitting *Glory* together with the rest of the canon. One of these concerns the theme of travelling (clandestinely) to Soviet Russia.[15] Martin keeps planning such a journey throughout the second half of the narrative, and the realization of this plan constitutes his seemingly futile (and fatal) exploit.

In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov imagines himself visiting his former homeland "with a false passport, under an assumed name" (250). But, again, the theme of return had figured in such early poems as "The Execution" (1927; *PP* 46–47) or "Dlia stranstviia nochnogo mne ne nado" ("For nighttime peregrination I do not need") (1929; *Stikhi* 217–18), in both of which the speaker fantasizes about a nocturnal visit to Russia. In a later poem, "To Prince S. M. Kachurin" (1947), the speaker actually travels to the former St. Petersburg with a false passport but, incriminatingly, "with a novel of Sirin in [his] hands" (*PP* 139).

There is also the full-length play *The Man from the USSR* (1925–26), featuring the secret agent Kuznetsoff, whose trips to and fro across the Soviet border would seem more than to answer Martin's dreams of selfless heroism. And further, the themes of passportlessness, a dream return, false identities, and secret agents are the stuff of such narrative texts as "The Visit to the Museum" (1939); "The Assistant Producer" (1943); or *Pale Fire*. In *Look at the Harlequins!*, Vadim's comical trip to Leningrad constitutes not just a realization but a subversive parody of the author's (and his heroes') life-long concern with a glorious return.

Zoorland

Before setting off across the border, Martin conceives in his mind a tale of an imaginary land taken over by totalitarian forces. This is "Zoorland" ("Zoorlandiia"), where "equality of heads" is imposed; caterpillars are forbidden to pupate; and pure arts and pure science are outlawed (147–48, 150, 152).

Later, Martin finds that the legend of Zoorland has been leaked by a treacherous confidante when a piece carrying this title by an émigré writer appears in a Berlin paper (166).

Another piece with the title "Zoorlandiia," actually an excerpt from the novel, was published by Nabokov himself in the émigré paper *Rossiia i slavianstvo* in 1931.[16] A year earlier a poem entitled "Ul'daborg" had purported to be "a translation from Zoorlandian" (*Stikhi* 235). And in the author's later fiction the theme of an imaginary land was to assume a dominant role in such works as "Tyrants Destroyed" (1938)—where the narrator denounces the tyrant's "zoological, Zoorlandic ideas"[17]—or the unfinished *Solus Rex* (begun in 1939),[18] and *Bend Sinister*, introducing the totalitarian ideology of "Ekwilism." The legend of Zembla in *Pale Fire* is but a particularly vigorous expansion of this recurring concern. As Nabokov noted in an interview, "a sad and distant kingdom seems to have haunted my poetry and fiction since the twenties" (*SO* 91).

Glory, or Exploit

There is still the theme of Martin's "exploit" (a literal translation of the Russian *podvig*). But what sort of an exploit?

In his Foreword Nabokov defines the glory attained by the hero as "the glory of high adventure and disinterested achievement; the glory of this earth and its patchy paradise; the glory of personal pluck; the glory of a radiant martyr" (xiii). Martin himself is led to reflect on "the passion for exploration of unknown lands, the audacious experiments, the glorious exploits of disinterested curiosity" (126).

That is, despite a streak of juvenile "romanticism" (the working title of the novel was "Romantic Times"),[19] Martin's heroism is on the whole of a concrete and levelheaded variety. Martin is not a poet. He is not even an avatar of the artist, like Luzhin in *The Defense*, but a man of action yearning for real adventure.

Such characters occur in Nabokov, along with the self-consciously artistic type. One need only think of figures like Nikitin in the untranslated story "Port" ("The Port") (1924); Ganin in *Mary*; Galatov in "The Doorbell" (1927); Kuznetsoff in *The Man from the USSR*; or the speaker of *Universitetskaia poema* (who expressly pleads with God *not* to let him become a poet [p. 237]).

At a slightly more distant remove, there are the numerous explorer-adventurers in Nabokov's work: the hero (an explorer-*manqué*) of "The Aurelian" (1930); the narrator of "Terra Incognita" (1931); the elder Godunov-Cherdyntsev in *The Gift*; or the participants in Captain Scott's polar expedition in the one-act play *The Pole* (1924)—one of whom is indeed characterized in terms looking forward to *Glory*: "To him life is a mixture of exploit and prank [*smes' podviga i shutki*]" (*USSR* 274).[20]

An autobiographical subtext is again involved here, for in *Speak, Memory* the author names an adventuresome ancestor (Nikolai Nabokov) who explored "Nova Zembla (of all places)" (52). And when Nabokov conjoins in "Lance" (1952) the motifs of mountain climbing—a test of manhood in *Glory* (84–87)—and travel in space, he is apparently reflecting on his son Dmitri's exploits as a climber,[21] but also anticipating his 1969 remark on the "remarkable romantic thrill" (*SO* 150) afforded by the first flight of the Apollo mooncraft.

Evidently, the subtexts could be multiplied still further. It has been proposed that the adventures and fate of the Russian Acmeist poet Nikolai Gumilev—shot by the Bolsheviks as a counter-revolutionary in 1921—may be "the main inspiration behind Martin's heroic fantasies."[22] This becomes tenable when one adds that Gumilev is actually quoted in *Glory*. Martin's prosaic-minded Uncle Henry complains, unwittingly echoing a famous poem: "In my time young men became doctors, soldiers, notaries [*notariusami*], while [Martin] is probably dreaming of becoming an aviator or a gigolo" (128).[23] Compare Gumilev: "I won't die in a bed / with a notary and a doctor standing by, / but in some wild gorge, / covered with wild ivy"[24]—a plausible foreview of Martin's fate once he has passed the border to Zoorland.

Reading *Glory* in the context of Nabokov's total opus takes us only so far. The author himself downplays the importance of such parallels when he warns in his Foreword that "the fun of *Glory* is elsewhere" (xiv). In other words, the work should also be examined in its own terms as a novelistic structure. Where does the "fun" of reading this novel reside?

At first glance, and perhaps even second, the structure of *Glory* appears straightforward, at least when compared to such notoriously involuted works as *Invitation to a Beheading* or *Pale Fire*. And still one need not agree with the view that *Glory* is the one Nabokov novel which "does not challenge the reader with subtle multiplicity of meaning."[25]

It is precisely such a naive reading that Nabokov wants to correct when he calls attention to "the echoing and linking of minor events [in the plot of *Glory*], back-and-forth switches, which produce an illusion of impetus" (xiv). One may be reminded here of the author's comments on the "wayside murmur of . . . hidden theme[s]" (*BS* xviii) placed in one of the trickiest and most overtly arealistic of his fictions.

As it turns out, in terms of narrative structure, *Glory* constitutes a characteristically Nabokovian instance of play with narrative embedding and links hidden between the embedded levels of fiction. Put briefly, the essence of this play is in the transference of motifs belonging to the embedded fictions (dreams, fairy tales, books within books) to the level of the narrative reality, until an impression is created that the fictions may somehow exert control over the reality within which they are contained—a device taken to its limits in *Pale Fire* but discernible in every novel by the author.[26]

Martin himself reflects on "the property that his reveries had of crystallizing and mutating into reality" (109). In his Foreword, Nabokov describes the hero as "that rarity—a person whose 'dreams come true'" (xii), and this property determines the structure of *Glory*.

One instance occurs when Martin confers with the counter-Bolshevist agent Gruzinov in Switzerland, hoping to receive tips for his journey: "From the garden two feminine voices called Gruzinov's name with the first syllable accented instead of the second. He looked out. The two English girls wanted him to come out and have ice cream. . . . 'How they like to bother me,' Gruzinov said, 'I never eat ice cream anyway'" (177). Martin vaguely feels that "sometime somewhere the same words had been spoken" (177–78). And the reader is required to be more astute than the hero, as here a motif from a dream seen by Martin years ago is quietly transferred to the narrative reality. Having learned of his father's death at Yalta, Martin dreamt of "himself sitting in a classroom with his homework not done, while Lida kept idly scratching her shin as she told him that Georgians did not eat ice cream: '*Gruziny ne edyat morozhenogo*'" (12). (The English text lays bare the onomastic pun *Gruzinov/gruziny* through an added nickname for the Russian Social Revolutionist: "Gruzzy" [178].)

In an analogous manner, the motif of white gloves (104) in Martin's nightmare about the Cambridge tearoom waitress Rose is later mutated into narrative reality when Rose is observed in a punt on the river Cam, her hand "incongruously clad in a white glove" (121). Martin's romantic reverie about "the sudden silence between two people in some dimly lit room" (82) is almost realized in the episode with Sonia (down to the motifs of a cigarette, an ashtray, and so forth [93–94]), but given an inverted ending when Sonia refuses to comply. And still another inversion takes place when Martin writes to his mother from Cambridge, trying to imagine the Swiss mailman who will take the letter to its destination—"walking across the snow; the snow crunched slightly, and blue footprints remained on it" (73). It is two years and more than a hundred pages later, when Martin has already vanished into the unknown and Darwin is on his way to break the news to Mrs. Edelweiss, that the footprint motif reappears under an unexpected guise. Darwin is here traversing the same ground as the imaginary mailman: "The rubber soles of [Darwin's] sturdy shoes left patterned impressions on the dark soil in front of the wicket. These footprints slowly filled with muddy water . . ." (205).

The most momentous instances of such transferred dream motifs occur in conjunction with the topos of a fairy tale in the novel.[27] The key episode in this respect concerns Martin's childhood reverie of "climbing into" the watercolor that hangs above his crib in Russia. The dream is inspired by a nursery tale at the opening of the novel (an embedded fiction), containing another picture (a second-level embedded fiction): "On the bright wall above the narrow crib, . . . hung a watercolor depicting a dense forest with a winding path disappearing into its depths. Now in one of the English books that [Martin's]

mother used to read to him . . . there was a story about just such a picture with a path in the woods, right above the bed of a little boy, who, one fine night, just as he was, nightshirt and all, went from his bed into the picture, onto the path that disappeared into the woods" (4–5).

An aquarelle showing "a dusky path winding through one of those eerily dense European beechwoods" reappears in *Speak, Memory* (86), where it is again given a structural function. Nabokov indicates that he, too, may have passed "into the picture" in the episode with his expatriate friend (aptly, his former drawing master): "'And what about Yaremich?' I asked M. V. Dobuzhinski, one summer afternoon in the nineteen forties, as we strolled through a beech forest in Vermont . . ." (*SM* 94). *In Look at the Harlequins!*, this motif—like so many others—is treated self-parodically, as Vadim claims to have exited from the U.S.S.R. along "a fairy-tale path winding through a great forest" (9).

But in *Glory*, the emblematic path winds through the entire narrative, while the borderline between the embedded picture and the outer reality is made more than problematic. The motif of the trail recurs at diverse moments of Martin's adult life. At Yalta, on the eve of his journey to exile: "Right under his feet [Martin] saw a broad black abyss, and beyond it the sea, which seemed to be raised and brought closer, with a full moon's wake, the 'Turkish Trail' spreading in the middle and narrowing as it approached the horizon" (20). In Switzerland: "The road was brightly sunlit and had many turns" (42); "They were driving home . . . along a dark forest road" (49); "[Martin] wandered off along the trail" (84). While staying in London Martin imagines: "A dark wood and pursuit" (92); and during a soccer match at Cambridge: "A forest path along which you run and run" (108). After the train ride to Molignac: "He began to follow a forest path, the path unwound, kept unwinding" (156). And again in the directions forwarded to him by Gruzinov: "Then all the way through the wood—it's a very dense wood . . ." (177).

Finally, after Martin has performed his exploit, this setting is transmitted via Darwin's point of view. The dream has now taken over reality, as it were, regardless of the dreamer: "Darwin emerged from the brown depths of the melancholy garden . . . and started back along the path through the woods. . . . The air was dingy, here and there tree roots traversed the trail, black fir needles now and then brushed against his shoulder, the dark path passed between the tree trunks in picturesque and mysterious windings" (205).

It remains to ask whether there is a deeper "metaphysical" message implied by the structure of *Glory*. This question is prompted by the recent trend in Nabokov scholarship to read the author's art as a cryptic commentary on "the hereafter," or "the other world" (Russian "potustoronnost'"), hidden behind our phenomenal one. Brian Boyd, basing his reading on the author's archives, talks persuasively of the "metaphysical shiver" that Nabokov wanted to incorporate in his writing.[28] In another study devoted to the problem,

Vladimir Alexandrov states that what motivates Nabokov's art is his "faith in the apparent existence of a transcendent, non-material, timeless, and beneficent ordering and ordered realm of being that seems to provide for personal immortality and that affects everything that exists in the mundane world."[29]

If such a concern is assumed to be central in Nabokov, it can be discerned in *Glory* as well (despite the inbuilt warning that "metaphysics can fool you" [76]). Obviously, the notion of another world should not be taken in an altogether literal sense. Such undue literalism is manifest in the claim, put forth by one critic, that *ghosts* inhabit the world of *Glory*.[30] In this view, "ghostly activity"[31] determines the concrete shape of the narrative—to the degree that Martin's brushes with death in the novel are seen as the work of his late father who "seeks to promote his son's death."[32] But precisely why the father's ghost would want to do this is never made clear.

It is true that the possibility of life after death is taken up as a theme in *Glory* as well as elsewhere in Nabokov. Having learned of his father's death, Martin attempts in vain "to catch a wisp of posthumous tenderness" (11) in the world that surrounds him. This recurs when he spends a night in deceased Nelly Zilanov's bedroom (91–92). Before undertaking his hazardous journey, he tries to review in advance his own death (182). Still, all such efforts by the hero prove to be in vain. The "ghost" (91) coming to him in the Zilanov bedroom turns out to be Sonia, very much alive. And similarly any attempt by the reader to extract from the novel a "solution" to the mystery of afterlife cannot but be—one regrets to say—overly optimistic.

Rather, if one wants to point toward a message or a unifying theme in *Glory*, it may be expressed in passages like the following, bearing on the hero's inklings of a mysterious order behind his existence: "And suddenly Martin again experienced a feeling he had known on more than one occasion as a child: an unbearable intensification of all his senses, a magical and demanding impulse, the presence of something for which alone it was worth living" (20). And again: "This something happy and languorous lured him from afar, but was not addressed to him" (46). Or, before leaving Sonia in Berlin to perform his exploit Martin senses "that innermost, mysterious something, which bound together the expedition, the love, and Pushkin's ode to autumn" (189).

It can be noticed that such passages are not unlike the speculations assigned to many other Nabokovian heroes. Compare, for example, Fyodor's efforts in *The Gift* to "understand what is concealed behind all this. . . . For there really is something, there is something!" (328). Or compare the concluding lines of the poem "Fame" (1942): "But one day while disrupting the strata of sense / and descending deep down to my wellspring / I saw mirrored, besides my own self and the world, / something else, something else, something else" (*PP* 113).

There is *something*, but it cannot be formulated in words, at least not by the hero trapped inside the narrative. According to a well-known theorem, the human mind can never grasp the universe of which it is a part. Conversely, an

order of a quite definite kind has been brought about by the structuring consciousness of the artist behind the literary text. And here the apparently metaphysical ruminations in *Glory* are given a metaliterary edge that is very distinctively Nabokovian.

In his foreword, Nabokov supplies one more key to the novel when he opposes the mind of the fictional hero and that of the artist who has created the fiction. As he explains, by *not* granting Martin literary imagination, he has prevented the hero "from finding in art—not an 'escape' . . . but relief from the itch of being" (xiii).

But what is denied the Nabokovian hero, may still be granted to the reader. For, as far as this novel goes, the transcendent order that Martin senses behind his life is constituted precisely by those hidden links and structural repetitions that the author has prepared for the delectation of his readers.

It is this sort of aesthetic glory that Nabokov extols in another novel when he writes that "the glory of God is to hide a thing and the glory of man is to find it" (*BS* 106). As to the existence of God, which has intrigued so many Russian writers, here it seems appropriate to give the last word to the author. In his lecture on Dostoevsky Nabokov wrote: "When dealing with a work of art we must always bear in mind that art is a divine game. . . . It is divine because this is the element in which man comes nearest to God through becoming a true creator in his own right" (*LRL* 106).

Pekka Tammi

NOTES

1. For the publishing history of the Russian novel, see *Glory* ix-x; Juliar, pp. 96–105.
2. With Parker, "Nabokov and the Short Story," p. 68.
3. But see also Grayson, p. 120.
4. Varshavsky, 1933, pp. 266–67. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations into English are by the author of the present article.
5. Osorgin (pseudonym of M. A. Il'in), 1932, p. 3.
6. Updike, 1975, p. 195. The review appeared originally in *The New Yorker* in 1972.
7. Other remarks on *Glory* are included in Field, 1967, pp. 116–23; Lee, 1976, pp. 50–55; Hyde, pp. 49–53; Rowe, 1981, pp. 40–45. The Russian fairy-tale subtext in the novel is studied by Haber.
8. Now available in the excellent 1989 collection of Nabokov's early Russian prose by Dolinin and Timenchik. In addition, "Kembridzh" was the title of an excerpt from *Glory* printed in *Poslednie novosti* in 1931; cf. Juliar, p. 499.
9. In the Russian original, this was "at Oxford" (*Dar*, p. 359). Nabokov himself wavered between Oxford and Cambridge, according to Boyd, 1990, pp. 165–66.
10. Also in *Universitetskaia poema*, p. 225.
11. Also in *Glory*, p. 56.
12. "Paipa! paipa!" ("Kembridzh," p. 339); "pie-pa, pie-pa" (*Glory* 72); "the piping cries of newspaper vendors" (*RLSK* 41).
13. Field, 1967, p. 117.

14. Compare *LATH* 3; *SM* 276; *Glory* 131. The year of Martin's graduation is missing from *Podvig*, p. 152.
15. On this theme, see also Dmitri Nabokov, "Nabokov and the Theatre," pp. 5–7.
16. Juliar, p. 499.
17. *Tyrants Destroyed*, p. 6.
18. Compare *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*, pp. 147–48.
19. For other discarded titles, see Boyd, 1990, p. 353.
20. Compare *Polius*, p. 63.
21. See *Perepiska s sestroi*, p. 62; Nicol, 1987.
22. Alexandrov, 1991, p. 224.
23. Compare *Podvig*, p. 149.
24. The poem is "Ia i vy" (1918). Cf. Gumilev, 1964, II, p. 10. See also Tammi, 1992.
25. Field, 1967, p. 118.
26. For a discussion of this device from a narrative-theoretical standpoint, see Tammi, 1985, pp. 183–221; on *Glory*, see pp. 190–91.
27. For the Russian folklore backgrounds of this topos, see Haber.
28. Boyd, 1991, p. 360.
29. Alexandrov, 1991, p. 5. Other studies with this emphasis include D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 185–223; Toker, 1989; Barabtarlo, 1991.
30. Rowe, 1981, pp. 40–45.
31. Ibid., p. 40.
32. Ibid., p. 42.

A HERO OF OUR TIME

A Hero of Our Time (*Geroi nashego vremeni*), composed of five stories and two introductions, appeared in its present form in 1841. Together with two other unconventional, innovative works, Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (1833) and Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1842), Mikhail Lermontov's novel competes for the title of "Russia's first great novel." It has long been considered a classic in Russian culture. This status, often so deadening, has not dulled the enthusiasm of Lermontov's readers, who for generations have identified with the novel's disenchanted hero, Pechorin, passionately pursued the novel's investigation of his psyche, debated the hero's moral worth, and occasionally had the temerity to wonder aloud whether Lermontov might not be a more gifted writer—or at least the more intensely romantic poet—than Pushkin.

A Hero of Our Time, despite this lofty status in Russian culture, would seem to be one of the rare subjects on which Vladimir Nabokov held no "strong opinions." If he did, he did not commit them to the book of that title, in which he opined on a wide range of art forms, works, literary techniques, and authors. Lermontov's *oeuvre* fares better in Nabokov's correspondence, memoirs, scholarship, and fiction only to the extent that any publicity is good publicity: "Lermontov *is* banal," he wrote to Edmund Wilson, defending his translation

of a lyric, "and as I am rather indifferent to him, I did not go out of my way to debanalize the passages you question" (*NWL* 160). Where *Alice in Wonderland* parodied canonical English lyrics, Nabokov's Russian version turned to Lermontov as a source of chestnuts in verse.[1] The commentary to *Eugene Onegin* notes some parallels between Pushkin and Lermontov, but Nabokov cannot resist, en passant, a few barbs. References to Lermontov appear rarely in Nabokov's fiction and in unflattering contexts.[2] Lermontov, finally, is dismissed as one of those "minor Russian writers" about whose works Nabokov's lecture notes were not preserved.[3]

With *Speak, Memory* the case is more complicated. It seems to treat Lermontov (1814–41) only as a duelist and as the author of a narrative poem, *The Novice*, which served, in a magic lantern show, to bore Nabokov and some captive coevals: "As usual with Lermontov, the poem combined pedestrian statements with marvelous melting fata morgana effects" (*SM* 162–63). And yet the magic lantern show serves as the main theme of the autobiography's central chapter, and a quotation from Lermontov resonates with the mature Nabokov's subsequent concern with visual creativity.

Nabokov did, in fact, pay considerable attention to Lermontov: a public lecture at Wellesley College ("Lermontov as a West European Writer," 1941), a jubilee article in *The Russian Review* ("The Lermontov Mirage," 1941), translations of several lyrics into English (1944), and an edition (1958) of Lermontov's novel, *A Hero of Our Time*, with an introduction, annotations, and a translation (the last in collaboration with his son, Dmitri Nabokov). All of this work is closely related. The article on Lermontov cites three poems, "Farewell," "My Native Land," and "The Triple Dream," which make up the entire Lermontov section in Nabokov's *Three Russian Poets: Selections from Pushkin, Lermontov, and Tyutchev* (1944). Sentences from the article migrate into a brief biographical note in the verse translations and then migrate again into the introduction to *A Hero of Our Time*. Such conservation of matter aside, only the *Eugene Onegin* project is of grander dimensions among Nabokov's editions. Among critical works which Nabokov himself prepared for publication, only his book on Gogol and his research on Pushkin surpass his work on Lermontov in length.

Nabokov's edition of *A Hero of Our Time* has been a persistent *succès de marché* within the category of translated classics. The Gresham's Law that applies to translations—the inferior ones circulate more freely than the superior ones—has not plagued Lermontov's novel. Nabokov's edition remains the one most commonly used in American universities. When Doubleday ceased to distribute it, Véra and Dmitri Nabokov renewed the copyright, and the Ardis Press took over publication in 1988. Although longer commentaries are available in separate volumes that have appeared since the 1941 jubilee (Durylin, 1940; Manuilov, 1975), Nabokov's superb annotations remain the most comprehensive available in any single edition of the novel in any language, and the translation is unsurpassed in accuracy.

Instantaneous critical success did not, however, precede the volume's enduring success in the classroom. *A Hero of Our Time* was met with virtual silence. The reluctance of academic and newspaper reviewers to appraise translations only partly explains this neglect. The book had the misfortune to appear during the same calendar year that brought two overwhelmingly controversial best-sellers to the English-language public: Nabokov's *Lolita* and Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*. Within a few years, Nabokov's edition of Pushkin's verse novel, *Eugene Onegin*, which he was in the process of preparing as he annotated *A Hero of Our Time*, would set off a vigorous debate on principles of translation that had passed unnoticed when he applied them to Lermontov's prose novel, and the Pushkin edition would remain Nabokov's most memorable translation project.

The only contemporary notice in English of *A Hero of Our Time* appeared in *The Slavic and East European Journal*, a periodical for teachers and scholars. J.T. Shaw's review remarked upon the useful apparatus of Nabokov's edition (map, introduction, notes, reproduction of a Lermontov painting of the Caucasus) and took issue only with its "polemical" tone, which Professor Shaw found directed against excessively high praise of the novel. The review compares the Nabokovs' translation favorably to one by Eden and Cedar Paul (Oxford, 1958) in terms of accuracy. But Shaw mentions, without examples, some inaccuracies in English tenses, and he calls attention to three "Gallicisms."[4] One may, indeed, question some of the verb tenses, as, for example, the use of a simple past ("carried") instead of the present perfect ("I have carried") in the phrase: "out of life's storms I carried only a few ideas," where the present perfect would have indicated the relevance of the past action to the diarist's present. Yet, as two of Nabokov's annotations indicate, Lermontov's tenses can shift suddenly and for literary effects.[5] And, because of differences between the Russian and English verb systems, there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between forms, and the translator must approximate the sense of the original in the target language. Nabokov's choice of the simple past tense (which implies no relevance of past to present) may sound less correct to the commonsensical English ear than the present perfect, but it is the verb form consistent with Nabokov's perceptive comment that Pechorin seems not to remember important information from one section of the book to the next.

Nabokov's alleged Gallicisms ("amateur" for "lover," "proper" for "own," "without me" for "with me not there") appear less culpable when one finds attestations to them in the English of Lermontov's period (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In this translation, no less than in his *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov chose words and phrases with an informed sense of period style, and French phraseology had flooded both the Russian and English languages of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By 1958, Edmund Wilson was less inclined to lavish praise upon Nabokov than he had been a decade before, but he was forced to concede that in this translation Nabokov had "pretty well caught the vein of the English narrative prose of the period" (*NWL* 322).

Nabokov's *A Hero of Our Time* had to wait eighteen years for an article which would take cognizance of its integrity and brilliance, Nicholas O. Warner's essay "The Footnote as a Literary Genre: Nabokov's Commentaries to Lermontov and Pushkin." Here Warner proposes that Nabokov's notes to Lermontov and Pushkin "both complement and compete with the texts they gloss."[6] In the case of *A Hero of Our Time* Warner points to the introduction's preemptive summary of the plot, critique of Lermontov's stylistic repetitiveness, and dismissal of his romantic effects; the notes, he argues, break up Lermontov's narrative with gratuitous digressions, controlling the reader's response and creating "a shadow text." Warner draws parallels between this pattern of work and commentary and similar patterns in many of Nabokov's novels, such as *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, *The Gift*, *The Defense*, and *Pale Fire*.[7]

It is difficult to argue with this reading of Nabokov's *A Hero of Our Time* as an integral, but multilayered work of art. The "good reader" of Nabokov's endnotes (201, n.47) is one who has read Nabokov's introduction attentively before reading Lermontov's text. And Nabokov's introduction begins and ends with images of fate and death, which, in turn, are echoed by the beginning and end of Lermontov's novel and by Nabokov's last endnote. Nevertheless, such a reading of the edition needs to be balanced by one which takes into account the extent to which introduction and notes provide an incisive critical analysis of Lermontov's novel, together with as concise and focused a practical rhetoric and poetics of fiction as Nabokov ever wrote. The plot summary in the introduction, seen from this point of view, becomes not just an attempt to destroy conventional suspense but also a rigorous analysis of the novel's differences between plot and story sequences, an analysis which has generally passed muster with subsequent scholarly analyses.[8]

The categories of Nabokov's poetics are decidedly Aristotelian: plot, character, diction, and meaning. Nabokov's rhetoric, like Aristotle's, deals with speaker, argument, and audience. Use of these traditional analytic terms, however, leads Nabokov quickly into a specific set of concerns which is consistent with the metaliterary comments in his fiction and with his other critical works and inconsistent both with Classical notions of "general nature" and with Romantic codifications of nature and the psyche.

The first of Nabokov's concerns is accuracy of detail—for him a cardinal virtue in literary representation no less than in translation and annotation. When literary clichés sanction inaccuracy, the result becomes doubly objectionable: "the nineteenth century Russian writer's indifference to exact shades of visual color leads to an acceptance of rather droll epithets condoned by literary usage" (xv). When Romantic literary style provides an easily catalogued set of inaccurate and indefinite "peg words," or "tokens of sense rather than particularizations of sense" (xiii), then the result for Nabokov falls short of art. He has no patience with an aesthetics which would tolerate inaccuracy and a

"commonplace style" in the name of charming simplicity: "genuine art is neither chaste nor simple" (xix).

Accuracy, which Nabokov himself achieves in his rigorously detailed and comprehensive geographic, ethnographic, literary, and cultural historical annotations, can lead to dilemmas in his discussion of art, especially when the demands of plotting or characterization confront the patterns of Lermontov's culture. The two are not necessarily unrelated, but they are not congruent either as a brief examination of Nabokov's objections to Lermontov's plotting will show. Nabokov offers as an example of the novel's "numerous and glaring inconsistencies" the situation that the Captain of Dragoons takes it for granted that Pechorin's second would not want to supervise the loading of the pistols. Here the logic of plotting dictates maximum attentiveness at a duel, but the culture of Russian gentlemanly duels would make such supervision a breach of etiquette (an assumption of the possibility of dishonorable behavior by an officer and gentleman). Lermontov wrote his novel when such etiquette held sway, but Nabokov would, in this case, free the novelist from such socio-cultural considerations. Likewise, Nabokov objects to the repetitive eavesdropping in Lermontov's novel (as he had objected to it in Proust and might have objected to it in his own *Camera Obscura*).[9] In this case eavesdropping (an easy solution to plotting problems, a special form of coincidence) falls afoul of Nabokov's general demand for complexity and variety. Yet Nabokov is forced to comment that eavesdropping plays a "perfectly organic" part in Lermontov's novel (x). This "organic" part might be related to the *moeurs* of a tightly organized, constrictive society. It might, that is, be an appropriate way of representing a specific historical situation. Instead, the eavesdropping is significant to Nabokov as part of an artistic design, one by which eavesdropping "ceases to strike the reader as a marvelous vagary of chance and becomes, as it were, the barely noticeable routine of fate" (x)—a routine of fate that figures in Nabokov's own fiction.

Nabokov, like Aristotle, is careful to distinguish imaginative literature from the historical or sociological record of what happened (xvii), and "accuracy" for Nabokov is not the keystone of a conventionally Realist aesthetic. The accurate details enter into a plot which achieves its most telling effects for Nabokov through the echoing subplots, the unexpected repetitions, the novel insights, and the dislocation of chronological sequence ("involute structure," vii) that are the hallmarks of his own literary art. Nabokov's introduction begins with a reading of Lermontov's lyric ("The Triple Dream") that shows how "spiral" (vi) plots and repetitions can work in the most seemingly simple of texts, and the introduction ends with a reminder that Lermontov's text and life embody just such layering and repetition (xix). History echoes art; Nabokov does not entertain the converse. He prefers European fiction (including works by Rousseau, Goethe, Chateaubriand, Constant, Byron, Pushkin, Nodier, and Balzac) to Russian history as the context for analyzing and evaluating Lermontov's novel (xvi-xvii).

Despite his reservations about Lermontov's craftsmanship, Nabokov is compelled to acknowledge his power: "the narrative surges on with such speed and force; such manly and romantic beauty pervades it; and the general purpose of Lermontov breathes such fierce integrity, that the reader does not stop to wonder . . ." (ix). Nabokov designs his rhetoric to run counter to this speed, beauty, and integrity, slowing the reader down, challenging the attractiveness of the text, fragmenting it. In part Nabokov does this by positing a "good reader" who has absorbed the teachings of his introduction. In part Nabokov slows the reader down by a device borrowed from Lermontov himself, negative inference. Lermontov's "Author's Preface" uses this technique to create a reader who will not be like "a provincial," incapable of understanding irony (1). Nabokov's negative examples are the "young readers" and nostalgic "elderly critics"—his 1941 essay had also featured "women" and "radical critics"[10]—who lack the "mature consciousness of art" (xvii) that his apparatus propounds and exemplifies.

Whether Nabokov has indeed insinuated himself so inextricably into Lermontov's text that the latter is transformed, if not destroyed, remains an open critical question. Those readers whose fascination with Lermontov's text survives Nabokov's analysis—and Nabokov seems, ultimately, to be one of them—cannot fail to acquire a sharper awareness of the text's enduring appeal and of their own capacity for understanding it.

William Mills Todd III

NOTES

1. Karlinsky, "Anya in Wonderland," p. 313.
2. Warner, pp. 168, 181 n.6.
3. Bowers, *LRL* viii.
4. Shaw, 1959, p. 181.
5. Lermontov, 1958, p. 205 n.80, p. 206 n.84. Subsequent references to this edition will be given in the text parenthetically.
6. Warner, p. 168.
7. Ibid., p. 172.
8. Gregg, p. 388.
9. Boyd, 1990, p. 368; Boyd, 1991, p. 177.
10. Nabokov, "The Lermontov Mirage," p. 32.

HUMOR

"To a joke, then, I owe my first gleam of complete consciousness—which again has recapitulatory implications, since the first creatures on earth to become aware of time were also the first creatures to smile" (*SM* 22).

In the famous opening of his autobiography, Nabokov tries to pinpoint the exact moment in time when he became aware of time. It was in August of 1903. The first awareness of time was also the first awareness of self, of self-in-time. He first knew that he was four at the moment when he learned that his mother was twenty-seven and his father thirty-three.

But his father was wearing his Horse Guards uniform. Why? His military service had long ago been completed. He must have been wearing the resplendent regalia, which, "with that smooth golden swell of cuirass burning upon his chest and back, came out like the sun," as a "festive joke" (*SM* 22).

Shall we skip the usual preliminaries and just proceed as though everyone knew what humor was? It is what makes normal people laugh, and the anxious smile. Disputes over what is and is not funny are notoriously repetitious and inconclusive. They are either killingly dull or simply killing, as in the case of the pardner who did not smile when he said that.

Not everyone would understand the meaning of the word "joke" to be exemplified by wearing one's old uniform. Not everyone need understand it. It might have been the sartorial punch line of some now irrecoverable family anecdote. It was in any case a part of the Nabokovian insouciant gaiety of deportment, a delight in bright, shiny, and slightly silly old things, whether those you wore and those you wrote.

Or silly new things, like the word "chronophobiac," coined in the first paragraph of the memoirs, immediately after the bright shiny calculation of the number of times a human heart beats in one hour: 4,500 times. These are all the jokier for being unnecessary. Like all poetry, a joke makes nothing happen.

The Wallpaper

The balance of this article will be an attempt to read some of the recapitulatory implications of the passage on page 22 of *Speak, Memory*, which are fairly extensive. The immediate concern of autobiography is, of course, ontogeny, the birth and development of individual consciousness. But the passage in question places that individual awareness ("my first gleam") in the frame of a long evolutionary line ("the first creatures on earth"). It invites a speculative response, not only about phylogeny, but perhaps even about a sort of cosmogony of Nabokov's humor.

When I sat down to make a note or two for this essay, my plans were hardly so grandiose. As a way of starting, I simply wondered what might result from trying to recall examples of Nabokov's humor without the slightest new

research. Given the single stimulus of the subject, Nabokov's humor, what might be the immediate and unaided response? To my surprise the first thing that came to mind was polar bears. I recalled the two very minor characters in *The Defense* (205): the polar bears in the Zoo in Berlin. "The frost, incidentally, was extraordinary. . . . The helpless mercury, under the influence of its surroundings, fell ever lower and lower. And even the polar bears in the zoo found that the management had overdone it." What is going on in the foreground is distinctly less than cheerful. Luzhin is thinking not about his father's bright uniform but about his father's grave—"the depressing waste patch and the cemetery wind."

But the polar bears are hilarious. So is that mercury, the decline of which is to be blamed on a demoralizing environment. There is something inherently funny about the pathetic fallacy and anthropomorphized nature, anyway, but these momentary elements of the scene are not there long enough to take on the least personality. They are nearly unmentionable.

One does not see the polar bear shrugging his shoulder and making a wry face at his companion when the management's telephone persists in being busy, or mute. One does not recall the high hopes that everyone had for the mercury when it was young, before it fell in with that ruinous ne'er-do-well, the ambient air.

There simply isn't time. The foreground action is too absorbing. The thermometer and the bears are part of the minimal decor, figures in the narrative wallpaper. To notice them takes either an effort of will (an assignment to write about polar bears in Nabokov) or the quirkish tricks of attention from which one occasionally suffers in the late afternoon of life. I noticed them. They belong to what I will here intend by wallpaper: the immediate layer beyond the foreground event, Luzhin's walking through the zoo and thinking of his father. They are part of the near and present environment of Nabokov's fiction and are the sort of thing to which the author of the prefaces was fond of inviting the reader's attention: "Delicate markers whose very nature requires that they be not too conspicuous" (*BS* xvii).

It is only at this level, I think, that one can usefully begin to comment. The comedy of the immediate novelistic event itself—the good if awfully distractable aviator King of Zembla, Alfin the Vague, flying his little Blenda into the scaffolding of a new hotel while smiling at the camera (*PF* 103)—this is too delicately poised on the cusp between horror and hilarity to support anything more than mention. Certain comic scenes in Nabokov are pure Marx Brothers: Marthe and all her family, including her latest lover, coming to visit Cincinnatus in his cell, bringing with them the full-length mirror, which brings, in turn, its own reflection (*IB* 99). To have juxtaposed this scene against that of Groucho, his brothers, and all the rest of the cast trying to mill about in a stateroom for two is to have said what can be said, at least about its comedic aspect.

The Residual Hum

The fine fat figure of 4,500 in that first paragraph of *Speak, Memory* does not look especially reliable as the number of times a human heart beats in an hour, though a more precise figure—4,497.5—would recommend itself even less, and what one supposes might be a nearer approximation to the truth, say a spread between 4,386 and 4,632 would be too finicky for the context or our patience. 4,500 is just precise enough for its supererogation to be funny and not precise enough to be tedious.

Why is precision funny? It isn't funny in those situations where it is required. Computer programmers checking out a blinding list of tildes, spaces, ampersands, numerals and colons do not find it funny, merely fatiguing. The infinite fussiness with which the railroad timetable encysts the tiny grain of information that he seeks is hardly amusing to the tired traveller.

It is the circumstances that make precision either dull or funny. Anxious to time an egg, one is dissatisfied with being told that the time is "eightish." But it is funny if the stranger stopped on the street glances at his wrist and tells you the time with a sidereal niceness. And there is something screamingly funny, at least to squeamish non-entomologists, about being very precise in describing butterfly genitalia.

The index in Nabokov is prime ground for the precision that blurs precision through a fog of frivolity. All the Nabokovs mentioned in *Speak, Memory* are naturally in the index, including the Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich, concerning whom the curious reader might consult pp. 9–16 (the entire Foreword) and pp. 19–310 (the balance of the book, leaving not a single printed surface that may be safely ignored). *Passim.*

In that same index two entries are necessarily side by side:

Aleksey (butler), 30, 182, 232

Aleksey (Prince), 62, 64

If I were the Royal Censor, something about this would make me uneasy. Hard to put one's finger on exactly what. Perhaps if one more mention of His Royal Highness, or better, two, could be arranged? And while the alphabetic order is, under NORMAL circumstances, certainly to be encouraged, still. . . .

But, the function of such precision aside, it is time to place it in the ghostly architecture of Nabokov's humor that I am trying to construct. It does not seem to me sufficiently "there" to our consciousness to place it even so near as the wallpaper. It is not enough of a figure.

It is emphatically *extra muros* and is rather a part of the background radiation of humor distributed evenly throughout Nabokov's universe: a jovial low hum of drollery that has been around since the little bang that gave birth, in August of 1903, to that unique version of consciousness which we call Nabokov.

One might remember the polar bears as discrete figures in the Nabokovian comedy, but what remains from the background radiation is not to be enumerated; it is rather an impression of tone and atmosphere. An instance of

synaesthesia, for example: the receiver of the telephone on the other end of the line is lifted, but the lifter is silent, and in this silence the caller is aware only of a "sonic vista" opening up. The thrilling rightness with which this verbal formula captures a common experience is a part of the distributed medium through which one moves in Nabokov's universe, aware of it or not.

To this second sphere of what I now realize is going to be a tripartite structure belongs all the purely verbal elegance and wit, the alliterative patterns, the coinages, the polyglottal punning and allusiveness, the figural shapes of sentences that outlast the words themselves.

Le roi s'amuse

(The king enjoys himself.) "He put his little spear back on the shelf and looked at me crookedly from a sidewise angle with a certain quantity of what may be called *roi-s'amuse.*"[1]

Beyond the narrative wallpaper and residual hum there is a further remove, one more step, perhaps the last, into the beyond of Nabokov's humor. *Ultima ratio regum*: in Nabokov the last resort is never, of course, to arms, but to an infinitely remote and thus happily unanalyzable amusement. In the spatial geometry of my argument, this is the final all-encompassing background, the Absolute, of Nabokov's humor.

We may designate this by what the French call *roi s'amuse*, or what they would call it if they were aware of the wider currency that Flann O'Brien gave to the name of Hugo's play. In the case of this humor, one never really finds out what the joke is, for the joke is never itself directly apprehended. One sees only its effect, the radiant glow of sub rosa laughter behind the features of the sovereign's face. Not everyone participates equally in the enjoyment of such a joke. Indeed, the question whether one even detects the presence of the joke depends in part upon whether one is or is not of the royal party. A stubborn republicanism can spoil it for you altogether.

Having located this joke in some sanctum strictly limited to single occupancy, I can scarcely commit the solecism of adducing an example. About this joke of jokes, or about its shadow, one can only speculate. The shadow of the joke, like that of the Emperor, must be no less venerated than the actual person of majesty.

Shadow itself, the word and all its cognates and cousins, might provide a way toward if not into this sanctum. Nabokov's humor, like perhaps all humor without exception, is ultimately dark. The festive joke at the origin of Nabokov's personal time may have come out like the sun, but the sun does not always and everywhere shine.

The last inexpressible joke, or Joke, is the central ineluctable and ineffable sadness of the world. Samuel Beckett provides a sort of guide: "Of all the laughs that strictly speaking are not laughs, but modes of ululation, only three I think need detain us, I mean the bitter, the hollow and the mirthless. They

correspond to successive . . . excoriations of the understanding, and the passage from one to the other is the passage from the lesser to the greater, from the lower to the higher, from the outer to the inner, from the gross to the fine, from the matter to the form. [. . .] The bitter laugh laughs at that which is not good, it is the ethical laugh. The hollow laugh laughs at that which is not true, it is the intellectual laugh. Not good! Not true! Well well. But the mirthless laugh is the dianoetic laugh, down the snout—Haw!—so. It is the laugh of laughs, the *risus purus*, the laugh laughing at the laugh, the beholding, the saluting of the highest joke, in a word the laugh that laughs—silence please—at that which is unhappy."[2]

The rule is one king at a time, enthroned upon the unhappiest of royal patrimonies, absolute loneliness. Nabokov's eschatological hopefulness is scattered throughout all his pages of fiction, essays, and interviews. His creature Pierre Delalande (1768–1849), and the only author whose influence he acknowledges, provides an elegant summation in the epigraph of *Invitation to a Beheading*: "Comme un fou se croit Dieu, nous nous croyons mortels" ("As a madman thinks that he is God, we think that we are mortal"). But the single title that sums up Nabokov's *mortal gaiety* is the novel from which that phrase derives: *Laughter in the Dark*.

Clarence Brown

NOTES

1. Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman*, p. 67.
2. Beckett, *Watt*, p. 48.

INVITATION TO A BEHEADING

When a critic asked him, "Do you have a novel towards which you feel the most affection, which you esteem over all others?" Vladimir Nabokov answered: "The most affection, *Lolita*; the greatest esteem, *Priglashenie na kazn'* [*Invitation to a Beheading*]" (*SO* 92). Written in "one fortnight of wonderful excitement and sustained inspiration" (*SO* 68), this puzzling novel and its gallows humor caused more than a few readers and critics to "jump up, ruffling their hair" (*IB* 8).[1]

The number of critical responses *Invitation to a Beheading* has received stands second only to *Lolita*. Some of the first Russian reviewers considered *Invitation* to be one of the most successful works of young émigré literature. Some linked its grotesque unreality to Gogol, while others discerned in Nabokov's condemned hero, Cincinnatus C., an echo of Kafka's Joseph K.;

however, Nabokov denied having read *The Trial* before he wrote *Invitation to a Beheading*. The element of farce, set against the grim threat contained in the title, makes *Invitation* a very different novel from Kafka's. Nabokov's mirror inversions, puns, and anagrams, the doubling of names and characters, their expansion and shrinking in size, the spatial and temporal reversals, etc., are much closer to the illogic of Carroll, whose *Alice in Wonderland* Nabokov translated into Russian in 1923.[2] G. Barabtarlo has recently pointed out several parallels between *Invitation to a Beheading* and the farcical execution in the Barney Kiernan tavern chapter of Joyce's *Ulysses*.[3]

The elusive and improbably named hero of *Invitation to a Beheading* is entrapped in an absurd world where characters with souls "more dead" than Gogol's[4] mock and torture him, before ceremoniously executing him. Cincinnatus is the only "real" character among the caricatures whose every word or gesture exposes their total arbitrariness and illegitimacy. However, the power these creatures exert over their captive is not absolute. Their world is a hastily assembled theatrical set, their macabre farce—a dilettantish production, and their prisoner, who is not entirely of their "transparent" world, remains elusive and "opaque." Just like the justice at the onset of the novel, so the execution at its close seems to be grossly miscarried, which leads to the final ambiguity: was Cincinnatus duly beheaded, or did he decline the "invitation" and escape through some loophole in the blundered production, through that secret "syncope" or "hiatus" in time that he once discovered (53), or through "the little crack in life, where it broke off, where it had been once soldered to something else, something genuinely alive, important and vast" (205)? Nabokov deliberately subverts the distinction between the illusory and the "real," accentuating the "incompleteness, the noncomprehensivness of each layer of significance,"[5] while the "unmotivated shifts in time and space and the destruction of causality place the depicted world of the novel within the perimeter of surrealist art.[6]

Because of the novel's amorphous shape and numerous incongruencies, it has often been compared to the notorious "nonnons" described in it by Cecilia C.—a collection of "absolutely absurd objects, shapeless, mottled, pock-marked, knobby things" that mean nothing to the naked eye (135). To make sense of these "monstrous objects" one had to inspect them in a special mirror whose crookedness was calculated in such a way as to produce wonderful and perfectly intelligible images: "You could have your own portrait custom made, that is, you received some nightmarish jumble, and this thing was you, only the key to you was held by the mirror" (135–36).

Among the various mirrors that can be turned to face the novel, three stand out most prominently: the political, the metaliterary, and the metaphysical. The political reading casts *Invitation* as an anti-utopian allegory about the clash between individual will and totalitarian collectivity, which is based on taboos and the principle of voluntary submission and collaboration. Written in Berlin in 1934, "some fifteen years after [Nabokov's] escaping from the

Bolshevist regime, and just before the Nazi regime reached its full volume of welcome" (5), *Invitation* obliquely reflects this dual historical context.[7] The mock trials in the Soviet Russia of the 1930s add a macabre extension to Carroll's Victorian fantasies. Although Nabokov once said that *Invitation* was "a story about Russia in the year 3000,"[8] he did not consider it a political novel and resented the association with "G. H. Orwell or other popular purveyors of illustrated ideas and publicistic fiction" (6). Indeed, the suggestion that solipsistic acts of imaginative escapism can dismantle totalitarian states would make *Invitation* a rather frivolous and morally untenable political opus. In one of the finest articles on *Invitation*, R. Alter presents the socio-political aspects of totalitarianism as an aesthetic category, as the tyranny of false art, and shows us how "Nabokov's aesthetics in fact lead us back to a metaphysics, and one with ultimately moral implications."[9]

In 1937, the poet V. Khodasevich suggested that the dominant theme of Nabokov's art is the "life of the artist and the life of a [literary] device in the consciousness of the artist." Nabokov's works are populated with an "infinite number of devices, which like elves or gnomes, scurry back and forth among the characters, and perform an enormous amount of work. They saw and carve and nail and paint, in front of the audience, setting up and clearing away those stage sets amid which the play is performed."[10] According to Khodasevich, the two realms—reality and art—constitute for Nabokov an insurmountable antinomy, so that "the passage from one world into the other, in whichever direction it is accomplished, is akin to death."[11] The execution of Cincinnatus is thus a metaphor for this transition.[12]

Despite strong anti-religious overtones in many of Nabokov's works of the 1930s, several of his early critics identified the subject of *Invitation* as metaphysical, or overtly religious. P. Bitsilli linked the novel to the metaphysical tradition of the medieval mystery. Behind Nabokov's allegory lurks a "dim vision of something 'real' lying beyond" sham "reality."[13] In a similar vein, V. Varshavsky claims that Cincinnatus's spiritual affirmation "is born out of the eternal aspiration of the soul towards a mystical union with the desired absolute state," which Varshavsky interprets in a religious sense.[14] G. Shapiro (1979) went so far as to identify in the novel an entire network of Christian motifs and allusions.

In 1979 Véra Nabokov in her introduction to the posthumous collection of her husband's Russian poems confirmed what some suspected for a long time, that "the beyond" ("potustoronnost'") was Nabokov's main theme. "Undetected by anybody, this theme, like a watermark permeates everything Nabokov wrote."[15] So far, the most systematic treatment of this theme was offered by V. Alexandrov in his book *Nabokov's Otherworld.* In his view, the duality of the physical and spiritual realms in *Invitation* points to the existence of "some other transcendent agency" to which Cincinnatus is inextricably linked. Cincinnatus's Gnostic insight makes it possible for him to grasp that his world is but an imperfect copy of that ideal metaphysical reality, while the

"poetic language is a guide to, and an expression" of it. The many inconsistencies of the world into which Cincinnatus has been cast, including the numerous "stumblings" in the narrative itself, stem from the "imperfection of the material world" vis-à-vis its perfect Platonic prototype. After the execution of Cincinnatus's mortal, corporeal self, his immortal "double" escapes into that "preexisting, and for him [and his author], intelligible and familiar transcendent realm."[16]

Metaphysics

In what follows, I would like to draw attention to the link between Nabokov's metaphysics and metafiction, to that elusive aspect of his art that Khodasevich once puningly called Nabokov's poetic "deformity and holy idiocy" ("urodstvo-iurodstvo").[17] The epigraph to the novel whose title invites the hero to die announces: "Comme un fou se croit Dieu, nous nous croyons mortels" ("Like a fool who believes himself to be God, we believe ourselves to be mortal"). Nabokov ascribes this sophism to the ancient sage Pierre Delalande, whom he cheerfully invented (*IB* 6) and who will offer more insights into the matters of death and the hereafter in Nabokov's next novel, *The Gift* (ch. 5).

The crime Cincinnatus is accused of at the beginning of the novel is "so rare and so unutterable that it was necessary to use circumlocutions" (72). Born "opaque" into a world in which beings are "transparent" to each other, Cincinnatus is "impervious to the rays of others, and therefore produced when off his guard a bizarre impression, as of a lone dark obstacle" (24). In his own English translation Nabokov renders this crime as "gnostical turpitude" (72).[18] Since the epithet "gnostic" has been applied often but loosely to Nabokov's writings, the term deserves closer scrutiny.[19]

As R. Haardt has explained: "Gnosticism is an eclectic religious doctrine which developed during the period of late Hellenism and early Christianity. As the word, gnosis, suggests, a type of mystical cognition lies at the base of this teaching. Gnosis, as distinct from the rational type of knowledge, means knowledge which per se brings healing and salvation. The Gnostic may acquire it by an act of divine revelation, chiefly through the mediation of a Savior or Messenger. Such Gnosis is knowledge of the benign acosmic Godhead; his emanations; . . . the Realm of Light . . . and . . . of the private divine spirit-self of man, which has been imprisoned [in the material world called Tibil, or the House of Death] by the world of demons [Archons] and the creator thereof [the Demiurge]. The summons which goes out from the Realm of Light to the Gnostic, plunged into a stupor of self-forgetfulness by the powers which created this world, awakens him out to his erstwhile condition and enables him to realize his own true situation in the world, as well as the pre-history of his existence, and the path of ascent into the Realm of Light. It is the content of such knowledge which therefore constitutes the 'Gnostic myth'."[20] This basic sequence of events and the underlying dualism

of spirit and matter shaped the majority of Gnostic myths. Without implicating Nabokov in embracing the ancient heretical faith, I would like to show how much of Cincinnatus's life is modeled on Gnostic topoi and how *Invitation* reenacts the cosmic drama of Gnostic redemption.

Sentenced to death for the crime of "gnostical turpitude," Cincinnatus is incarcerated in a stone fortress where any corridor leads him back to his cell. The fortress is built like the Gnostic labyrinth, described in the "Naassene Psalm": "Having once strayed into the labyrinth of evils, / The wretched [Soul] finds no way out . . . / She seeks to escape from the bitter chaos, / And knows not how she shall get through."[21] On the macrocosmic level, the material world is enclosed within a cosmic prison guarded by the moon, a Gnostic symbol representing one of the seven Archons who keep watch over the gates to the planetary spheres. In *Invitation* some invisible hand keeps attaching a prop moon to, and removing it from the portcullis at night, the watchman physically manages the time by erasing and re-drawing the hands of a clock on the prison wall (135), while it strikes the hours arbitrarily (22). The prop moon and "tarbrush time" allude to the flawed and finite time created by the Demiurge, who "intended to implement into his work the likeliness of the inexplicable Eternity of Time and Infinite Space, but created instead only imperfect time and space, within which all material existence was confined."[22] A watchman "wearing a doglike mask" (13), and a soldier "with the face of a borzoi" (212–13), stand in the corridors of Cincinnatus' "House of Death." Such guards bring to mind not only the notorious bodyguards of Ivan the Terrible, called "oprichniki" and carrying dog heads as insignia, but also the guards of the planetary spheres called Archons, who are often depicted as wearing animal masks in Gnostic myths.

In Gnostic texts the word "prison" was a metaphor for man's flesh, within which languished the Gnostic soul, often referred to as the "pearl": "Why did ye carry me away from my abode into captivity and cast me into the stinking body?" laments the soul in the text of "Ginza."[23] Nabokov makes explicit the "prison-body" metaphor in his description of Cincinnatus in a wash-tub, when "the very structure of his rib cage seemed a triumph of cryptic coloration inasmuch as it expressed the barred nature of his surroundings, of his goal" (65). Cincinnatus's exclamation, "I am! like a pearl ring embedded in a shark's gory fat—O my eternal, my eternal" (90), and his groping "on the sandy bottom for a glimmer" (95), are reminiscent of the central Gnostic image of the imprisoned soul from "The Hymn of the Pearl," in which the Gnostic was to dive into the sea to retrieve a pearl (his soul) from an underwater serpent.[24]

The Gnostic dualism of spirit and flesh (*pneuma* vs. *hyle*) accounts for Cincinnatus's duality. Inside the physical, submissive prisoner lives another, "additional Cincinnatus" (15), the rebellious and spiritual "double of Cincinnatus" (25, 29) who represents the Gnostic "internal man." The more spiritually animated Cincinnatus becomes, the less tangible are the manifestations of his physical self. At times Cincinnatus seems to completely dissolve

into the pneumatic essence of his inner double. Cincinnatus's "fleshy incompleteness" (120) makes it almost impossible for the author to grasp the corporeal side of his elusive hero, consisting of "a thousand barely noticeable, overlapping trifles: of the light outline of his lips, seemingly not quite fully drawn but touched by a master of masters; of the fluttering movements of his empty, not-yet-shaded-in hands; of the dispersing and again gathering rays in his animated eyes; but even all of this, analyzed and studied, still could not fully explain Cincinnatus: it was as if one side of his being slid into another dimension" (121).

A "pre-cosmic fall," in which a part of the divine substance fell into the material world or into the body, underlies the genesis of the world and of human existence in the majority of Gnostic systems.[25] Once, while still an infant, Cincinnatus too "slipped out of the senseless life" and "stepped straight from the window sill onto the elastic air," where he remained "transfixed in mid-air" for a short while (96–97). The eventual fall of the child, unaware of gravity's existence, straight toward "the senior educator, a fat, sweaty, shaggy-chested man" with his "hairy arm extended in malevolent amazement" (97), parallels the Gnostic fall from the pneumatic origin into the corporeal world. From then on Cincinnatus is aware that he is not an ordinary being, "that part of [his] thoughts is always crowding around the invisible umbilical cord that joins this world to something—to what I shall not say yet" (53).

The opposition of *pneuma* and *hyle* differentiates the two antagonists of the novel, Cincinnatus and M'sieur Pierre. The ruddy-complexioned and foul-smelling executioner, with a tattoo on his biceps and around his nipple, represents a bizarre collage of erotic, acrobatic, anatomic, gastronomic, and aesthetic vulgarities, including even "the bliss of relieving oneself" (153). M'sieur Pierre, who deems himself an artist, embodies quintessential "poshlost'," or self-satisfied vulgarity (see the article "Poshlost'" in the present volume). Gnosis enjoins the Gnostic to avoid contamination from his surroundings. Cincinnatus not only avoids physically touching his executioner, but he even attempts to exorcise his own corporeal self. According to Gnostic teachings, "the soul after death travels upwards, leaving behind at each sphere the . . . 'vestment' contributed by it: thus the spirit stripped of all foreign accretions reaches the God beyond the world and becomes reunited with the divine substance."[26] To this end, the Gnostic practices the rituals of "divestment," in which the soul sheds layer after layer of its depraved flesh. "Grief and woe I suffer in the body-garment into which they transported and cast me. How often must I put it off, and how often put it on" ("Ginza").[27] In *Invitation* Cincinnatus performs similar rituals in which he gradually crosses from metaphorical "divestment" to actual "disembodiment": "'What a misunderstanding' said Cincinnatus and suddenly burst out laughing. He stood up and took off the linen trousers and shirt. He took off his head like a toupee, took off his collarbones like shoulder straps, took off his rib cage like a hauberk. He took off his hips and his legs, he took off his arms like gauntlets and threw them

in a corner. What was left of him gradually dissolved, hardly coloring the air" (32; see also 90). Divested of the material ballast, the Gnostic hopes to attain the likeness of his immaterial God.

In Gnostic teachings God's existence is hidden. God is an unknown essence, and the dark nature of the world obstructs his radiant portents. Therefore, a divine revelation is transmitted to the "chosen one" in whom the "spark" dwells through a Messenger who arrives "from beyond." The future Gnostic is alert for signs "from without," announcing the Messenger–Savior, for whose arrival the Gnostic was preparing all his life. Cincinnatus's fortress is strewn with a multitude of portents "from without," but most of them turn out to be false. Cincinnatus anxiously listens to the noise of an unknown savior, who comes closer each day as he digs a tunnel to Cincinnatus's cell. This enigmatic tunnel-digger reminds one of an analogous version of salvation found in the text of "Ginza": "To me a Great Uthra was sent, / a Man who was to be a Helper to me / . . . He smashed their Guard-Houses / and beat a breach in their Citadel."[28] Cincinnatus eagerly prepares for such a moment, but when finally "the yellow wall cracked about a yard above the floor in a lightninglike pattern . . . and suddenly burst open with a great crash" (158), instead of the redeemer, out of the hole crawl the prison director Rodrig and M'sieur Pierre, who invites Cincinnatus for a glass of tea in his cell. M'sieur Pierre, who has up to this point acted as Cincinnatus's fellow inmate and ally (having supposedly been arrested for his attempt to free Cincinnatus), treats him not to tea, but to a look at his "broad, shiny ax": "We will have our cup of tea later" (163).[29] While Cincinnatus is crawling back through the tunnel, the floor suddenly opens out from under him and he finds himself at liberty. There the prison director's daughter Emmie awaits him and leads him by the hand through a labyrinth of corridors and doors straight into her father's dining room, where the director's family and M'sieur Pierre are sitting around a samovar. Cincinnatus is seated in a corner and given no tea to drink. In Gnostic texts the evil spirits, the Archons, are characterized by deception and mockery. The true Messenger of God, the Great Uthra, warns the Gnostic: "Behold, the whole world / is a thing of no worth / . . . Behold the double pits / which Ruha has dug on the way."[30]

Cincinnatus's mother Cecilia proves to be a more reliable Messenger, but Cincinnatus does not immediately believe in her authenticity and suspects that someone is treating him to "a clever parody of a mother." The mother tells her son the "legend" about his father, an unknown transient, and her quasi-immaculate conception. Then Cincinnatus asks: "'Can it be true that he vanished into the dark of night, and you never found out who he was or where he came from—it's strange . . .' [. . .] 'Only his voice—I didn't see the face,' she answered as softly as before" (133). Cincinnatus learns from her about his likeness to his father. The faceless transient, who disappeared in the dark of night, is reminiscent of the Gnostic notion of an unknowable God, called "the Alien," "the Nameless," "the Hidden," or "the Unknown Father."[31] The legend

of Cincinnatus's father bears an analogy to Gnostic revelation, in which the genealogical link between the Gnostic and the kingdom of the unknown God is reestablished. After this important revelation Cincinnatus changes his attitude toward his mother, whose authenticity he had doubted "not quite fairly"—as Nabokov remarked in an interview (*SO* 76). During her visit Cecilia describes to her son the marvelous "nonnons" whose crooked mirrors offer Cincinnatus a quasi-gnostic way of looking at the absurd jumble of his world.

Since gnosis is the cognition of an unknowable and ineffable God, its content is often expressed in terms of the *via negationis.* God becomes revealed in the failure of reason and speech, and the very account of this failure is a proof of his existence. The numerous *topoi ineffabilitatis* and the recurring phrase "I know something" pertain to Cincinnatus's gnosis: "Yes, from a realm forbidden and inaccessible to others, yes. I know something, yes . . . I know something. I know something. But expression of it comes so hard!" (90–91).

According to a famous Valentinian formula, gnosis is defined as "The knowledge of who we were, what we have become, / where we were, where we were cast, / where we are hastening, of what we are being freed, / what birth and re-birth really is."[32] Answers to these four questions constitute the saving knowledge. Cincinnatus's gnosis is formed like a mosaic of separate revelations and insights. In the fall of the pneumatic child into the world, several answers to the first Gnostic question can be found: we were cast from the ideal realm into a corporeal and cosmic prison. To the question, "Where are we hastening?" the answer is simple. Death is the central theme in *Invitation.* Cincinnatus carries on a struggle with death, or rather with his own fear of death. The prison is the materialized metaphor of this fear, while the jailers are personifications of the same. However, beginning with Chapter Eight, hints at death's illusory nature grow more insistent. In Chapter Thirteen, like in a medieval allegory, Cincinnatus plays chess with his executioner—and wins. However, only towards the end of the novel does Cincinnatus find the proper Gnostic answer to death. At this point the "horror of death" seems to him "a harmless convulsion—perhaps even healthful for the soul—the choking of a newborn child." Cincinnatus also recalls that "there once lived, in caverns where there is the tinkle of a perpetual stillicide, and stalactites, sages who rejoiced at death" (193). In this significant passage, an answer is given to the last questions of gnosis: "Of what are we being freed?" and "What [are] birth and re-birth . . . ?" Death is represented here as a joyful event, as a new birth, which liberates the soul from its prison. The "sages who rejoiced at death," are, perhaps, an allusion to the feat of the ancient Gnostics who conquered death, in a manner reminiscent of the novel's epigraph. In the penultimate chapter the last revelation takes place. On the eve of the execution the jailer Rodion brings a beautiful moth for the cell's spider to devour. This time, however, the voracious spider does not get its treat. The "splendid insect" takes off and suddenly disappears "as if the very air had swallowed it" (204). It is possible that this moth (unmistakably revealing the signature of the lepidopterist Nabokov)

is also tinged with Gnostic symbolism. In the Gnostic emblem called the "Angel of Death," the Archon is depicted as a "winged foot crushing a butterfly"—the symbol of the soul and of life.[33] The way in which the moth dissolves into thin air parallels Cincinnatus's pneumatic ability, when after his ritual divestment "what was left of him gradually dissolved, hardly coloring the air" (32). Immediately after this revelation Cincinnatus crosses out the last word written by him in this life, on his last sheet of paper. The crossed out word is "death" (206).

At this stage of Cincinnatus's "gnosis," death seems to be a joyful awakening from the nightmare of reality, the final liberation of the soul from the "House of Death." The sum total of the answers to the four questions of gnosis is in itself salvation. "He who attains to this gnosis and gathers himself from the cosmos . . . is no longer detained here but rises above the Archons" states "The Gospel of Eve."[34] At the moment of execution, while the mortal Cincinnatus is still counting to ten, his immortal double raises his head from the block and steps off the scaffold, leaving behind the crumbling world, his jailers, who become many times smaller, and the executioner, who shrinks to the size of a larva (223). The diminution of the figures and their sinking into a vertical perspective produces an optical illusion of Cincinnatus's posthumous ascent.

After all spiritual substance is reintegrated with the prime source, God, there comes the eschatological moment in which the material cosmos, devoid of the *pneuma* and of Light, is destroyed. "The works of the whole Tibil shall fall into Confusion and the whole Firmament shall be shaken" ("Ginza").[35] This Gnostic prophecy comes true at the close of *Invitation.* The novel's last lines are a genuine eschaton: "Little was left of the square. The platform had long since collapsed in a cloud of reddish dust. . . . Everything was coming apart. Everything was falling. A spinning wind was picking up and whirling: dust, rags, chips of painted wood, bits of gilded plaster, pasteboard bricks, posters; an arid gloom fleeted; and amidst the dust, and the falling things, and the flapping scenery, Cincinnatus made his way in that direction where, to judge by the voices, stood beings akin to him" (223).

The soul of the last Gnostic has left the terrestrial world and returned to its celestial origin, which exists beyond the confines of the mortal life into which the hero happened to fall at the beginning of the novel. Like the Prodigal Son, Cincinnatus returns to his unknown and faceless Father, who had transferred to his son the divine Spark. Having completed a full circle, the novel fulfills the promise made in the epigraph from the apocryphal book, *Discours sur les ombres*, by the invented author, "M'sieur" Pierre Delalande: "Comme un fou se croit Dieu, nous nous croyons mortels."

Metafiction

A Russian writer once said that Nabokov is a writer "who has neither any God,

nor perhaps, any devil."[36] In his early poetry, Nabokov frequently turned to Christian motifs, which after 1925 entirely vanished from his art. Nabokov later dismissed them as stylistic exercises in "Byzantine imagery" that was "mistaken by some readers for an interest in 'religion'"(*SO* 160). It should be remembered that Nabokov, who once explained "God's popularity by an atheist's panic" (*SO* 147), had little sympathy for collective religions or mysticism (*SO* 39, *SM* 39), and preferred "to stay godless, with fetterless soul / in a world that is swarming with godheads" ("Fame," *PP* 111). This and similar statements are hardly proof of Nabokov's atheism or agnosticism. "Since, in my metaphysics, I am a confirmed non-unionist and have no use for organized tours through anthropomorphic paradises, I am left to my own, not negligible devices when I think of the best things in life . . ." (*SM* 297). The irreverent Gnostic faith was an elitist heresy that mocked the canons of ruling orthodoxies. Jewish and Christian dogmas were exposed as a part of the Demiurge's scheme designed to fool the Gnostic, who was to rely on his own "not negligible devices" for escape. In the poem "Fame," Nabokov hints at the "main secret" of his "godless, fetterless soul": "I admit that the night has been ciphered right well / but in place of the stars I put letters, / and I've read in myself how the self to transcend— / and I must not be overexplicit" (*PP* 111).

It seems that at least part of Nabokov's "secret" has to do with letters. Indeed, if we were to translate the underlying Gnostic model in *Invitation* into the categories of poetics (by putting letters in place of stars) we would be able to generate a peculiar myth, devised as an analogue to Nabokov's poetics. Such a deconstruction of the metaphysical novel into a metapoetic fiction would create room for a satisfying speculation about the nature of Nabokov's "poetical theology."

"My characters are galley slaves," Nabokov once puningly said about the despotic nature of his creations (*SO* 95). "Every character follows the course I imagine for him. I am the perfect dictator in that private world insofar as I alone am responsible for its stability and truth" (*SO* 69). Like some almighty deity, the author immured his hero within the walls of the invented cell, invited him to a beheading, and mocked him all the way to the scaffold. There is an analogy between a captive of an authoritarian state and a character entrapped in the labyrinth of fictive plot. If we were to draw a Gnostic parallel with the author's role, it would be that of a Demiurge, while the "House of Death" would be the book itself. It was Nabokov's poetic sentence that "sentenced" Cincinnatus to death, sent him to the galleys of the printed book, where the armchair executioner, wielding a knife—for the book appeared with uncut pages in 1935—was rushing, page by page, chapter by chapter, the final decapitation (*obezglavlenie*) of the hero and the book itself. Thrown by the evil force into this mocking world, Cincinnatus, like a novice Gnostic, begins to question the legitimacy of his haphazard surroundings and their creator.

But next to his role as a Demiurge, the author also assumes a benign role. In Gnostic myths the being "from beyond" descends into the terrestrial world

and passes saving knowledge to the Gnostic. In the text of "Ginza" this messenger is portrayed in a manner for which it is not difficult to select a corresponding poetic parallel: "I am a word, a son of words, who have come in the name of Jawar. The great Life . . . sent me forth to watch over this era, to shake out of their sleep and raise those that slumber. It is said to me: 'Go, gather thee a following from the Tibil . . . Elect, and draw the elect out of the world'."[37]

The main feature of Cincinnatus's godless world—if translated from the language of theology into the language of poetics—is the absence of poetic language: "Those around [Cincinnatus] understood each other at the first word, since they had no words that would end in an unexpected way, perhaps in some archaic letter, an upsilamba, becoming a bird or catapult with wondrous consequences" (26). Their language has depreciated and "the ancient inborn art of writing is long since forgotten" (93).

It is significant that the moment when Cincinnatus first discovers his pneumatic origin during his "pre-cosmic fall" coincides with the day when he learned "how to make letters" (96).[38] As a child, Cincinnatus would sit on a river-bank with a book, "and the water [would throw] its wavering reflection on the lines of an old, old poem" (193). Cincinnatus "would feast on ancient books" (27), and he has read Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, which Nabokov translated many years later into English. In his cell Cincinnatus tastes the forbidden fruit as he reads the novel *Quercus*, whose hero is an oak tree from which one day a "dummy acorn" falls straight into his cell (126).[39] Thus the other meaning of the "gnostical turpitude" that separates Cincinnatus from the rabble is his cultural literacy. Because of his affiliation with culture—moreover, with Nabokov's culture—the author, like the "Son of Words," selects Cincinnatus for the Gnostic task.

In the text of "Ginza" the "Son of Words" shows to his chosen one the path to salvation: "He handed me his leaves, / prayers and orders of prayers were filled with them. / Again he handed me some of them, / and my ailing heart found recovery."[40] In the first chapter of *Invitation* the author places on the table in Cincinnatus's cell "a clean sheet of paper" and "a beautifully sharpened pencil, as long as the life of any man except Cincinnatus" (12). It is said in the "Gospel of Truth" that a person who has Gnosis, "if he is called, he hears, replies, and . . . performs the will of Him who called him."[41] The author's summons, when he intones "What anguish! Cincinnatus, what anguish! What stone anguish . . ." (48) was answered by Cincinnatus's first written words, "Oh, my anguish—what shall I do with you, with myself?" (51). In the prison cell a poet is born. In the course of twenty days Cincinnatus creates his own literary work, his artistic *confessio fidei*. Each chapter of the novel corresponds to one of those days. Cincinnatus' confession includes letters, diary notes, recollections, and philosophical études. Taken as a whole, these scattered fragments constitute the inner story encapsulated within the authorial text. Cincinnatus's pencil, that "enlightened descendant of the index

finger" (12), several sheets of paper, and the faint hope for immortality constitute the only means Cincinnatus has to answer the gallant invitation. He attempts to "write off" his fear and thus render death harmless. This fear diminishes in direct proportion to the shortening of his pencil (12, 89, 206). The last wish of the condemned concerns only the posthumous destiny of his creation": "Save these jottings—I do not know whom I ask, but save these jottings . . . I must have at least the theoretical possibility of having a reader" (194). As we saw, the last word, written with a pencil-stub on the last sheet of paper—"death"—is crossed out. This was, then, the result of the saving gnosis, transmitted to the new-born poet by the "messenger of words," the author, who created his hero in his own image and likeness.

The partaking of the mystery of creativity is a mortal's only hope—but not a guarantee—of immortality. In Nabokov's "esthetic theology" a work of genuine art is a sacred text, and only a chosen few are allowed to shine in his aesthetic sky, while the earth below swarms with a multitude of idols and pretenders. The Olympus of literary immortality is inaccessible to the carousers and charlatans, and the consummate Nabokov maintains a strict guard over the gates to his Elysium, letting in neither his heroes nor many writers of great renown, such as Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Sartre. Naturally, Nabokov reserves for himself a place in this heaven.[42]

Cincinnatus is still a novice in this craft. "Trembling over the paper, chewing the pencil through to the lead" (91), he carries on a relentless struggle with words. A whole series of *topoi ineffabilitatis*, which I associate with the inexpressibility of the Gnostic God, are Cincinnatus's attempts to discipline his inarticulate tongue and capture the poetic word: "Not knowing how to write, but sensing with my criminal intuition how words are combined, what one must do for a commonplace word to come alive and to share its neighbor's sheen, heat, shadow, while reflecting itself in its neighbor and renewing the neighboring word in the process, so that the whole line is live irridescence; while I sense the nature of this kind of word propinquity, I am nevertheless unable to achieve it, yet that is what is indispensable to me for my task, a task of not now and not here" (93).

Eventually Cincinnatus becomes aware that above his inferior world and word there exists the "original of the clumsy copy" (93), the superior world and word of his author. "*There, tam, là-bas,* the gaze of men glows with inimitable understanding; *there* the freaks that are tortured here walk unmolested. . . . *There, there* are the originals of those gardens where we used to roam and hide in this world . . . *there* shines the mirror that now and then sends a chance reflection here" (94).[43] Having looked through the novel's intricate prism, Cincinnatus realizes that his movement about "the limited space of the haphazardly invented cell" is but a "flashing reflection of a rotated mirror" (121) in the hands of the author. At one point Cincinnatus quite matter-of-factly concedes, "I write obscurely and limply, like Pushkin's lyrical duelist" (92), thus identifying himself with a character in *Eugene Onegin,* the hapless

poet Lensky, who is doomed to die and whose poems Pushkin mocks. Once Cincinnatus realizes the inferiority of his own existence and creation in comparison to those of his author, he launches a truly Gnostic rebellion against the creator deity and the tyranny of his demiurgical creation. Cincinnatus's gnostic insight allows him to glimpse behind the cover of the book in which he has to die not the sagacious eye of immortal God, but an anthropomorphic deity, reminiscent of the dreaming Red King in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass.* Cincinnatus, who seeks immortality, conjectures at one point that he actually cannot die, because he has never lived, except on the pages of this book, while the only mortal being here is the author himself. This is how Cincinnatus formulates his "turpid" gibe: while reading the novel *Quercus* (the appearance of a book always signals the proximity of the author in Nabokov's writings), Cincinnatus would imagine ". . . how the author, still a young man, living, so they said, on an island in the North Sea—would be dying himself; and it was somehow funny that eventually the author must needs die—and it was funny because the only real, genuinely unquestionable thing here was only death itself, the inevitability of the author's physical death" (123–24).[44]

In Cincinnatus's spiteful but ingenious sally against the tyranny of Nabokov's creation, one can discern the Gnostic echo of the 82nd Psalm in which God passes judgment on the Demiurges: "I have said, Ye are gods; / And all sons of the Most High; / But ye shall die like men, /And fall like one of the Archons." In many Gnostic eschatological myths the Demiurge annihilates his creation: "Lord, let me destroy the world which I made," prays the Demiurge in the "Book of Baruch"; or "She [Ruha] arose, destroyed her property," in the text of "Ginza."[45] At the novel's close Vladimir Nabokov the Demiurge (the name "Vladimir" means "the ruler of the world" in Russian) demolishes his universe and executes the Gnostic who peered through the cover of the book and refused to believe in its reality. Cincinnatus declines the invitation, and thus brings about the novel's collapse. With his other hand, Vladimir Nabokov the Savior (Vladimir rhymes with "redeemer," as Nabokov once jokingly remarked [*SO* 52]) rescues his hero from the novel's cataclysms because Cincinnatus has passed the author's test. Cincinnatus lifts his head from the oaken block and walks off through the apocalyptic dust of the shattered book "in that direction, where, to judge by the voices, stood beings akin to him" (223). The character returns to his creator, who has fashioned him in his own image and likeness. Thus, in addition to the poetic inspiration, talent and freedom which the hero inherited from his no longer "unknown father" at the beginning of the novel, Cincinnatus also wins his share of immortality as an artist.

"Comme un fou se croit Dieu, nous nous croyons mortels." This, then, is the message of the "turpid Gnostic" Nabokov who in his "holy idiocy and poetic deformity" translated the metaphysics of the ancient Gnostics into his own metafiction. In this mystical link between the created and the creating universe, I believe, lies the "main secret" of Nabokov's "theology." Cincinnatus's

search and discovery of his "creator" are not unlike the metaphysical probings of Nabokov himself, who liked to toy with the idea that human life is, perhaps, only a "muddled preface" to some "main text" ahead,[46] or a "*commentary to* [an] *abstruse unfinished poem*" written by some unknown, yet readable master (*PF* 67). In 1925 Nabokov wrote to his mother: "We are translators of God's creation, his little plagiarists and imitators, we dress up what he wrote, as a charmed commentator sometimes gives an extra grace to a line of genius."[47] However, to the ultimate question: "Do you believe in God?" Nabokov gave a quibbling Gnostic answer: "To be quite candid—and what I am going to say now is something I never said before, and I hope it provokes a salutary chill—I know more than I can express in words, and the little I can express would not have been expressed, had I not known more" (*SO* 45).

Sergej Davydov

NOTES

1. *Invitation to a Beheading* was written in 1935, serialized in *Sovremennye zapiski* (*Contemporary Annals*), nos. 58–60, 1935–36, and published in book form in Paris: Dom knigi, 1938. The present essay is based on a chapter from my 1978 Yale Dissertation: *Teksty-matreshki Vladimira Nabokova* [*The "Matreshka-Texts" of Vladimir Nabokov*]. Munich: Otto Sagner, 1982.
2. Some specific motifs come readily to mind: the death sentence at the end of the mouse's "long tale/tail" (ch. 3), the Queen of Hearts' words: "Sentence first—verdict afterwards" and "Off with her head!," to which Alice replies in a manner worthy of Cincinnatus: "You are nothing but a pack of cards!" (ch. 11).
3. Barabtarlo, 1990, p. 391.
4. Bitsilli, 1936, p. 194.
5. Toker, 1989, pp. 124–25.
6. L. Foster, 1974, p. 128.
7. Nabokov's stories "The Leonardo" ("Korolek," 1933), "Cloud, Castle, Lake" (1937), "Tyrants Destroyed" (1938), and the novel *Bend Sinister* (1947) were all born of a similar Soviet/Nazi historical context. For political interpretations of the novel, see Varshavsky, 1956, pp. 205–25, and Rampton, 1984, pp. 31–63. Sisson, 1979, compared *Invitation* to H. G. Wells's "The Country of the Blind." *Invitation to a Beheading* could be also linked to Zamiatin's *We*. Written in 1920 and published in English in London in 1924, *We* anticipated Huxley's *Brave New World* and inspired Orwell's *1984*.
8. Interview with Lee Belser in the *Los Angeles Evening Mirror News*, 31 July 1959.
9. Alter, 1970, p. 55.
10. Khodasevich, "On Sirin," pp. 100, 97.
11. Ibid., p. 98.
12. Khodasevich's article pioneered a long series of metaliterary interpretations of Nabokov's art as ostentatious artifice. E. Pifer (1980), for example, sees the principal antinomy in the clash between the incompatible realms of "average reality," promoted by the traditional realistic novel, and the "true reality" of Cincinnatus's and Nabokov's

superior artistic insight. D. Peterson (1978) in his elegant reader's response interpretation presents "literature as execution" and implicates the reader in that gory act. However, the "armchair executioner," conditioned by the norms of naive realism prevalent in the traditional novel, is incapable of capturing the "opaque," "hard to read" Cincinnatus, who escapes from the block as well as from the reader's claim on his soul into "a richly imagined afterlife beyond the text's last word."

13. Bitsilli, 1939, p. 69.
14. Varshavsky, 1956, p. 223.
15. Nabokov, *Stikhi*, introduction by Véra Nabokov.
16. Alexandrov, 1991, ch. 3, pp. 94, 89, 86.
17. Khodasevich, "O Sirine," p. 200.
18. In the original Russian, the crime is "gnoseologicheskaia gnusnost'" ("gnoseological abomination," *Priglashenie na kazn'*, p. 80).
19. Moynahan, Predislovie, pp. 13–16, was the first to interpret Cincinnatus's crime as "Gnostic." Nicol, 1967, p. 85, calls Nabokov's novels "gnostic"; Hyman, p. 71, terms Nabokov a "deeply Gnostic writer;" Peterson, 1978, alludes to several gnostic elements in the novel; and D. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, calls Nabokov "a gnostic seeker." Davydov dedicated a whole chapter of his 1978 dissertation to Cincinnatus's "gnostic confession" (Davydov, 1982, pp. 100–137); and Alexandrov, 1991, partially models Nabokov's metaphysics on the gnostic model.
20. Haardt, p. 3.
21. Jonas, p. 52.
22. Danzas, p. 330.
23. Jonas, p. 63.
24. Ibid., pp. 113–116, 125–129.
25. Ibid., p. 62.
26. Ibid., p. 45.
27. Ibid., p. 56. Cf. "The Hymn of the Pearl": "And their filthy and unclean garb I stripped off, and left in their country" (*Gnosticism: A Source Book* . . . , p. 120).
28. Haardt, p. 389.
29. Gnostic hymns are full of examples of similar deceptions: "And the watchmen of the gates of the Aeons sought me, and all those who stay within their Mystery mocked me" ("Pistis Sophia," Jonas, p. 68). "Their delight is deceit and their tree was hostility . . . and their promise is death to him" ("Apocryph of John," Jonas, p. 92).
30. Haardt, pp. 392–93.
31. See the chapter "The Unknown Father" in Grant.
32. Haardt, p. 4.
33. Cirlot, p. 33.
34. Jonas, 60.
35. Haardt, p. 396.
36. The words belong to the well-known émigré writer Boris Zaitsev, quoted in Struve, p. 287.
37. Jonas, p. 80.
38. The fall of the child Cincinnatus from the window echoes an analogous episode in the life of the poet V. Khodasevich, whom Nabokov considered to be "the greatest Russian poet that the twentieth century has yet produced." See Khodasevich's poem "Ne mater'iu . . ." ("Not by the mother . . .") in *Tiazhelaia lira* (*The Heavy Lyre*, 1922), and his memoir "Mladenchestvo" ("Infancy," 1933).

39. Nabokov wrote his introduction to the English edition of *Invitation to a Beheading* in "Oak Creek Canyon, Arizona" (8).
40. Haardt, p. 382.
41. Jonas, p. 89.
42. See Nabokov's poem "V raiu" ("In Paradise," *PP* 45).
43. Cincinnatus's insistent "*There, tam, là-bas . . .*" echoes the refrain of Baudelaire's "L'invitation au voyage": "Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, / Luxe, calme et volupté."
44. This author, who is "still a young man," may obliquely refer to M'sieur Nabokov himself, who was approximately Cincinnatus's age when he wrote the novel. The "islands in the North Sea" allude to the archipelago of Nabokov's northern islands: Zoorlandia (*Glory*), Ultima Thule ("Ultima Thule" and "Solus Rex"), and Nova Zembla (*Pale Fire*). "My inventions, my circles, my special islands are infinitely safe from exasperated readers" (*SO* 241).
45. Jonas, p. 64, Haardt, p. 346. Cf. the analogous end of V. Khodasevich's 1921 poem "Gorit zvezda . . ." ("The star is burning . . .") in *The Heavy Lyre.*
46. "Ultima Thule," in *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories,* p. 179.
47. Quoted in Boyd, 1990, p. 245.

KING, QUEEN, KNAVE

Since its initial publication in 1928, readers have regarded *King, Queen, Knave* (*Korol', Dama, Valet*) as a work strikingly different from Nabokov's first novel *Mary.* Unlike the characters in the earlier novel, the protagonists are not Russian émigrés but Germans, and the novel (particularly in its revised English form) displays less of the intense lyricism that permeates *Mary.* Critics writing in 1928 noticed these changes. M. Tsetlin commented on Nabokov's bold decision to move away from "Russian themes" and remarked that the novel seems at times to read like a translation from German, although he finds no traces of "Germanisms" in the text.[1] Georgy Ivanov, in a scurrilous attack on Nabokov published in the first issue of the journal *Chisla* (*Numbers*), even went so far as to claim that *King, Queen, Knave* was meticulously copied from mediocre German models.[2]

Perhaps mindful of such observations, Nabokov asserted in his foreword to the English translation of the novel that at the time of its writing he "spoke no German, had no German friends, had not read a single German novel either in the original, or in translation" (viii). He asserts that he could have staged the novel in Rumania and Holland as well as Berlin, but that his familiarity with "the map and weather" of Berlin settled his choice. While this assertion may be largely accurate, certain revisions made for the English translation seem to highlight a specific concern with the character and history of the German people, a concern that is explained by Nabokov's dismay over the depredations committed during the years of Nazi rule.

Yet a major distinction between Nabokov's first and second novels lies not so much in the nationality of the main characters as in the author's treatment of them. Many critics have remarked upon the characters' resemblance to the stylized playing card figures named in the title of the novel. Gleb Struve and Alfred Appel, Jr., each refer to the "cardboard characters" presented in the novel,[3] while other critics have pointed out how Nabokov's handling of his protagonists underscores their affinity with the various images of mannequins, dummies, and puppets interspersed throughout the novel.[4] Although it may be something of an exaggeration to regard the central characters merely as playing card figures (and critics such as Ellen Pifer and Leona Toker have both argued for a more rounded view of the protagonists), Nabokov himself suggested that he wished to avoid the "human humidity" that permeated *Mary* (viii). As a result, each of the central characters is endowed with sharply delineated character traits which seem nearly to fulfill the aim of Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev's biography of Nikolay Chernyshevski in *The Gift*: to skirt the narrow ridge between the "brink of parody" on the one hand, and "an abyss of seriousness" on the other (200).

Nabokov succeeds well in finding for his characters images that aptly convey the essential features of their personalities. Martha Dreyer—determined, calculating, and meretricious—is driven by a desire to possess both her husband's wealth and her lover's body, thereby blending "bank and bed," as the English version of the novel puts it (114). Her narrow-mindedness and materialism are neatly expressed in the contentment she experiences when she slips into a green dress early in the novel: she suddenly feels "that her soul was temporarily circumscribed and contained by the emerald texture of that cool frock" (42). Her lover—Dreyer's nephew Franz—is myopic, shallow, and cruel. Nabokov evokes the limited range of Franz's vision when he repeatedly depicts the character trying to keep his eyeglasses on, even during lovemaking (166). The eyeglass theme becomes particularly noticeable in the English version of the novel: Franz, stripped of his will by Martha's imperiousness, wears *two* pairs of glasses when rowing the boat to the site where Dreyer's murder is to take place (243).

Dreyer himself is egocentric, self-satisfied, and prone to inutile flights of fancy. His solipsistic smugness emerges during the nighttime excursion he makes to his department store where he attempts to show Franz how one should sell ties to gullible customers. After treating Franz to a fantastic demonstration of the way ties might be sold "if the salesman were both artist and clairvoyant" (70), he leaves the store with a feeling of pleasure at the "enigmatic disorder he had left behind *while neglecting to think that perhaps someone else would be held responsible for it*" (73, emphasis added).

The plot of the novel revolves around the interaction of these three characters, and Nabokov establishes here a pattern to which he would return numerous times in his career: the impulse of one party in a romantic relationship or marriage to initiate an affair with a third party and the attendant

(usually destructive) consequences that stem from that impulse. Nabokov's "bright brute" (vii) of a novel provides a penetrating portait of three individuals who miss out on opportunities to savor the full richness of life due to basic limitations within their personalities such as narrow-mindedness or egocentricity.

The first of these characters encountered in the novel is Franz Bubendorf, seen at the outset boarding a train to leave his provincial hometown for Berlin, where he hopes to make his fortune in life. Franz is no Julien Sorel, however (unless one views him as a comic version of Sorel, as suggested by Rampton),[5] and Nabokov's portrait of the character highlights the poverty and coarseness of his desires in distinctive ways. On the one hand, Franz displays a pronounced squeamishness when confronted with many aspects of raw physicality. The sight of a man with a deformed nose opens for Franz a "chamber of horrors" in his memory, and he recalls with disgust a series of unpleasant physical images witnessed in his past (3). On the other hand, though, he himself seems impelled by crude physical urges. Foremost is his primitive lust, a trait that is significantly increased in the English version of the novel (this version contains more erotic material and more references to bodily functions). When he first catches sight of Martha, he kindles an erotic fantasy and promises himself "a lone treat" that very night (13). Once he arrives in Berlin, he fantasizes about bringing a woman to his room where he can "rip off her dress and possess her" (47). The English version also discloses a sadistic streak within the character. At one point Franz "nostalgically" recalls an old dog that he "had managed to kick smartly on several occasions" (30); later he mentions how he and a friend shot "lots" of stray cats at home (51). In revising the novel, Nabokov even suggests that Franz would become a participant in Nazi atrocities later in life. The revised version contains a passage referring to Franz in the future as an old man "guilty of worse sins than avunculicide" (138).

Despite these traits, though, Franz's role in the novel is primarily passive rather than active. He does not direct the lives of those around him as much as he is directed by them. In one of the novel's many ironies, Franz comes to Berlin expecting to find "freedom" (19), but discovers instead a state of bondage and submission to the will of others, particularly to Martha. After he becomes her lover, his life is transformed into a monotonous routine of automatous repetition, both at work and in Martha's arms: "Returning home in the same way, he would do once again all that was expected of him" (201). Not only is his physical life at her disposal, but even his imagination "was at her command" (200). He, more than any of the other characters in the novel, comes to resemble the mannequins in the department store where he works, and the degree of mechanical repetition in his life has led critics to invoke Bergson's discussion of automatism as the basis for comedy when they analyze *King, Queen, Knave*.[6]

The agent of Franz's enslavement is Martha Dreyer, and it is her desire that fuels the forces of destruction in the novel. At the outset, however,

Martha's corrosive energies are dormant, and she serves, in Brian Boyd's words, as Nabokov's "first in-depth attempt to define *poshlost'* (philistine vulgarity)."[7] Like Tolstoy's Ivan Ilyich, she has lived a life dedicated to the acquisition of possessions that conform to a bourgeois notion of elegance and refinement. When Franz first visits her house, she relishes the thought of "dazzling him with undreamt-of wealth . . . and hearing this rather handsome boy's moans of respectful admiration" (28). Yet the furnishings of the house reflect its mistress's lack of originality: "neither aesthetic nor emotional considerations ruled her taste; she simply thought that a reasonably wealthy German businessman . . . ought to have a house exactly of that sort, that is, belonging to the same suburban type as those of his fellows" (35).

The revisions Nabokov introduced into the novel accentuate the conformist dimensions of Martha's personality. An early scene depicts the woman stoically embracing the stuffy atmosphere of a railway car: "It is supposed to be stuffy in a car: that is customary and therefore good. Life should proceed according to plan, straight and strict, without freakish twists and wiggles" (10). This attitude of grim stoicism prevails in her relationship to her husband as well. Again like Ivan Ilyich, she finds herself in a loveless marriage, but she accepts this condition because she believes that it is entirely customary and normal. In her opinion, "discord always reigned . . . the wife always struggled against her husband . . . and all this amounted to happy marriage" (65).

When Franz enters her life, however, her mood changes abruptly: "For the first time in her married life she experienced something that she had never expected, something that did not fit like a legitimate square into the parquet pattern of their life. . . . Thus, out of a trifle . . . something had started to grow, joyful and irreparable" (41). Martha now has an unprecedented opportunity to experience genuine love, but her passion for possession and control never permits her to experience the full richness of human love. Initially viewing Franz as "warm, healthy young wax that one can manipulate and mold till its shape suits your pleasure" (31), she comes to luxuriate in her ability to make him obey her commands (see 167). Her passion for Franz borders on the obsessive, and she feels that without his "obedient" lips and body, "she could not live more than a single day" (199). There is even something parasitical in her relationship to her lover. As she feeds on his body ("I can certainly touch you, and nibble you, and even swallow you whole if I want" [134]), he begins to lose weight and waste away (see 200). Martha succeeds in absorbing Franz so completely into her life that he becomes merely one more in a series of lifeless possessions: "My dining room, my earrings, my silver, my Franz" (124).

One obstacle stands between her and her imagined happiness—her husband—and so she begins scheming over ways to eliminate the man. Nabokov's handling of Martha's preoccupation with murder exposes the impoverished and derivative nature of her imagination. She draws much of her inspiration from "trashy novelettes . . . thereby plagiarizing villainy" (178), and she thinks of dictating a suicide note to Dreyer using a sentence from "a

Tauchnitz novel" (190). Through these references to plagiarism Nabokov invites the reader to see in Martha a quasi-authorial impulse, an impression that his English-language revisions enhance. In the following sentence, for example, the underlined phrase was added in Nabokov's English revision: "Believing, *with so many novelists*, that if the details were correct the plot and characters would take care of themselves, Martha carefully worked out the theme of the burglarized villa" (180).

The link Nabokov draws between Martha's desire to murder her husband and the plotting carried out by a novelist anticipates the central theme of his later novel *Despair*, where the protagonist Hermann Karlovich lays bare the link and cries out: "Let us discuss crime, crime as an art" (121). For Martha as for Hermann, control over others is a paramount goal, and she, like her successor, commits an egregious error as she unfolds her scheme to do away with her intended victim. As the narrator puts it in *King, Queen, Knave*: "The blind spot was the victim. The victim showed no signs of life before being deprived of it" (180).

Martha is incensed by the vitality her husband displays. While he is "aflame with rich life" (205), and seems to fill up her whole house with his "gross physicality" (199), Martha wishes to see him inert: "She needed a sedentary husband. A subdued and grave husband. She needed a dead husband" (197). The inability or unwillingness to appreciate living life in all its richness represents a severe drawback in Nabokov's world, and Martha's attitude toward Dreyer clearly manifests this flaw. She wishes to ignore the animate Dreyer, the "dangerous irksome Dreyer who walked, spoke . . . guffawed" (177). In his place she substitutes "a second, purely schematic, Dreyer, who had become detached from the first—a stylized playing card, a heraldic design—and it was this that had to be destroyed" (177). This act of substitution, and the rejection of living life that it implies, signal both the inadequacy of Martha's quasi-authorial impulses and the inevitable failure of her murder plans. Genuine artists, from Nabokov's perspective, may exercise total control in the realm of fiction or art (*SO* 69), but they may not exert such control over the beings around them.

Martha's feeble attempts to author a satisfying plot are foiled by the workings of an incomparably superior artist—the novelist Nabokov himself. Characteristically, Nabokov utilizes that very element of Dreyer's identity that most aggravates Martha—his unpredictable vitality (and life's "freakish twists and wiggles" [10])—to overturn her plans. Just as she is on the verge of bringing her murder scheme to fruition, Dreyer utters the chance remark that he will make one hundred thousand dollars on the very next day. Startled by the specter of this unexpected prize, Martha postpones the murder attempt, and her delay proves fatal. Instead of Dreyer, it is she who dies, stricken by a sudden case of pneumonia.

As one often finds in Nabokov's fiction, Martha's lack of success in her venture is foreshadowed by an incidental gesture she makes earlier in the novel.

While waiting for Dreyer to return home one night (and hoping that his car would crash, thereby removing him neatly from her life), she writes his name with a pencil. As she starts to black it out, the pencil tip breaks, and she does not finish the task. Minutes later, Dreyer enters, and Martha laments: "My spells don't work" (128). In this incident one detects the outlines of a concept that will recur later in Nabokov's work: the potential for transforming one's life through the skillful application of pen or pencil to paper. One thinks, for example, of Cincinnatus's final written gesture in *Invitation to a Beheading*: when he crosses out the word "death" on a piece of paper, he effectively ensures a negation of death for himself as well.

While Martha's connections to the realm of artistic inspiration are minimal, those of her husband are more noteworthy. Jane Grayson, for example, has called Dreyer an artist *manqué*, and Carl Proffer termed Dreyer a "frustrated artist."[8] Nabokov augmented this aspect of Dreyer's personality when revising the novel for publication in English. While the Russian text contains statements about Dreyer's active imagination and his penchant for dreaming (see, e.g., 215), the English text adds the explicit assertion that in his boyhood, "Kurt had wanted to be an artist—any kind of artist" (223). Unfortunately for him, however, "there was some fatal veil between him and every dream that beckoned to him" (223–24). Although the text does overtly reveal what this fatal veil is, Nabokov's readers can discern in Dreyer's personality serious flaws which undermine his aspirations to the status of authentic artist. Not only is he "naively self-centered" (154), he readily falls prey to a kind of numbing perceptual apathy. Once he has gained a quick impression of a person or a situation, that impression remains fixed forever. In Nabokov's felicitous phrase, the "bright perception became the habitual abstraction" (106). Dreyer lacks the energy or will to consider the fact that an object "might change of its own accord and assume unforeseen characteristics" (106). He therefore remains blind to the potential for growth, change, and metamorphoses in life—processes that were of vital interest to Nabokov as lepidopterist and artist.

While Dreyer's summary judgment of Franz may not be far from the mark ("a timid provincial nephew with a banal mind and limited ambitions" [106]), his view of Martha reveals his ignorance of her inner life: she, "for more than seven years now, had remained the same distant, thrifty, frigid wife" (106). Even when his former mistress Erica tells him that his wife is probably unfaithful to him, he refuses to surrender his fixed conception: "I'm telling you she's cold and reasonable, and self-controlled. Lovers! She does not know the first letter of adultery" (175). Dreyer's insistence on his wife's fidelity rings with special irony here since the reader has earlier been told of Martha "that she who thought herself ripe for adultery had long grown ready for harlotry" (101). Erica herself neatly summarizes Dreyer's relationship to his wife: "You love her—oh, ardently—and don't bother about what she's like inside. You kiss her

and still don't notice her. You've always been thoughtless, Kurt, and in the long run you'll always be what you've been, the perfectly happy egotist" (175).

Dreyer's unwillingness to examine closely those people who are nearest to him prevents him from achieving a relationship of true intimacy with Martha. During one moment of high tension he considers trying to speak frankly with her, but "as had happened more than once," he decides "at the last minute not to say anything." The narrative continues: "There is no knowing if it was from a wish to irritate her with silence or simply the result of contented laziness, or perhaps an unconscious fear of dealing a final blow to something he wanted to preserve" (40). Such moments as these arise in Dreyer's life, and he lets them pass. Instead of reaching beneath the surface of experience to explore the complexity of the human spirit, he contents himself with idle play, trying to fill the void with one distraction after another.

As Martha is an inveterate consumer of material goods, Dreyer is an avid consumer of human energies. He regards everyone around him as a potential source for personal enjoyment. When he glimpses the man whose deformed nose had so horrified Franz, he reacts quite differently: "ought to get such a dummy to display something funny" (16). He views Franz himself as "an amusing coincidence in human form" (106), and considers him primarily a source of potential amusement. Mentally addressing Martha, he implores: "allow me to play a little too—leave me my nephew" (40). Later, he does "play" with Franz—on the tennis court—where the preparations he makes "with the thoroughness of an executioner" (187) are followed by a pitiless session in which Franz becomes the hapless victim of Dreyer's shots.

Unable to become an accomplished artist in his own right, Dreyer feeds off of the dreams of others. The "poetical vision" (195) which absorbs him through the central portion of the novel is a plan to create a series of mechanical mannequins who would move in a lifelike way: they could model clothes in the windows of his department store. This subplot affords Nabokov the opportunity to raise fundamental issues about creativity and the relationship between natural life and constructed artifice. Flanking the central triad of characters are two secondary characters whose appearance in the novel serves to highlight these issues for the reader.

The first of these is the creator of the automannequins, a shadowy figure identified only as "the inventor." This figure plays an intriguing role in the novel. On the one hand, he is the creator of the automannequins, mechanical dummies which many readers have identified as emblems of the novel's protagonists. In the English version of the novel Nabokov bolsters the association between the automannequins and the central triad of characters by changing the distribution of automannequins so that instead of three male figures, there would be two males and one female.

Yet the inventor also serves another purpose: it is his invention that provides Nabokov with the pretext for removing Dreyer from the setting of the impending murder. The inventor thus appears as a kind of authorial agent, a

character introduced into the story primarily to advance the author's master design. Nabokov's description of the character enhances this impression. When the figure first appears he is depicted as "a nondescript stranger with a cosmopolitan name and no determinable origin. He might have been Czech, Jewish, Bavarian, Irish—it was entirely a matter of personal evaluation" (88). The ultimate identity of this figure pales in significance before the function he fulfills in the novel. A striking passage near the end of Chapter Five lends support to the notion that the inventor is carrying out the mission of a higher master. Remarking on the fact that the inventor happens to be staying in the same hotel room in which Franz had spent the night after his arrival in Berlin, the narrative states: "It is significant that Fate should have lodged him there of all places. It was a road that Franz had travelled—and all at once Fate remembered and sent in pursuit this practically nameless man who of course knew nothing of his important assignment, and never found out anything about it" (107–8). The inventor's "important assignment" may be to save Dreyer from death at the hands of Franz and Martha.

"Fate" is often associated in Nabokov's novels with the designs of the extradiegetic author, and such an association is made explicit in the English version of *King, Queen, Knave*. When discussing the Dreyers' preparations for their trip to the seashore, Nabokov adds a telling passage to his text: "That little trip to Pomerania Bay was in fact proving to be quite a boon for everybody concerned, including the god of chance (Cazelty or Sluch, or whatever his real name was), once you imagined that god in the role of a novelist or a playwright, as Goldemar had in his most famous work" (224). This passage exhibits several allusive and self-reflexive facets. "Cazelty" echoes the name of the "Fatum Insurance Company" (142), whose director attended a party given by the Dreyers. "Sluch" is related to the Russian word for chance—*sluchainost'*—which also happens to be the name of a short story written by Nabokov and published in 1924 (and subsequently translated with the title "A Matter of Chance"). Goldemar, a figure not found in the Russian text, is identified in this text as the author of a play entitled *King, Queen, Knave*. Nabokov signals to the reader here that "fate" or "chance" are the agents of the authorial consciousness that has crafted this fictional world. The inventor is one of his minions.

Occupying a role parallel to that of the inventor is Franz's landlord Enricht. Like the inventor, he fulfills a dual function in the novel: he serves both as a kind of pseudo-creator and as an authorial agent. Nabokov presents the inventor as a figure with a nebulous identity; likewise he depicts Enricht as something of a mystery. As the narrative puts it: "actually (but this of course was a secret) he was the famed illusionist and conjuror Menetek-El-Pharsin" (99). Whether Enricht had once worked as a conjuror or whether this is merely one of the many fantasies he spins for himself remains unclear.

Both figures work to support powerful forces within the novel. While the inventor serves the purposes of "Fate"—providing a distraction for Dreyer that will save him from the murderous plans of Martha and Franz, Enricht

serves an opposing force—that of the destructive passion itself. As the inventor had inspired Dreyer with a vision of the animated mannequins, so too does Enricht inspire Franz and Martha with visions of sexual activity. Enricht's assumption that Franz might bring his lady friend back to his room "flattered and excited" the young man (59), and Franz's recollection of this assumption later fuels his perception of an erotic bond between himself and Martha (63). Similarly, the picture which hangs in the room Franz rents from Enricht depicts (in the English version of the novel) a "bare-bosomed slave girl . . . being leered at by three hesitant lechers" (53). This image subsequently reappears in Martha's dream as three "lecherous Arabs . . . haggling over her with a bronze-torsoed handsome slaver" (76).

It is surely no coincidence that both Dreyer and Martha embark upon their new ventures at approximately the same time. The inventor enters Dreyer's life at the outset of Chapter Five; it is also in Chapter Five that Martha comes to the room that Franz rents from Enricht to begin their adulterous affair. Just as the inventor, through his work on the automannequin project, succeeds in saving Dreyer from Martha and Franz near the end of the novel, so too does Enricht save Martha and Franz from discovery by Dreyer earlier in the work. Dreyer meets Franz by chance one day (in the Russian text Dreyer exclaims "Neozhidannyi *sluch*ai"—"An unexpected chance occurrence" [208]), and he accompanies Franz back to his room. Martha, however, is waiting there for Franz, and the sudden arrival of her husband threatens to expose her infidelity. Although she struggles to bar the door against the two men, she is on the verge of giving in when suddenly: "there was silence, and in the silence a squeaky querulous voice uttered the magic anti-sesame: 'Your girl is in there'" (221).

If it is true that the inventor and Enricht serve opposing forces, with the former an agent of unpredictable fate and the latter an agent of a mechanistic sexual passion, then Franz's wistful rumination about the near-discovery of his affair with Martha rings with a certain irony: "Last Sunday fate had almost saved him" (226). As long as Franz and Martha continue to meet in Franz's room under Enricht's protective aura, Fate cannot break up their destructive relationship and release Dreyer (and Franz) from Martha's designs. Only when the trio moves out of Berlin and into a new setting on the seashore will Fate be given a free hand to save Dreyer and eliminate Martha. As shall be noted below, it is also at the seashore that the presence of the authorial consciousness makes itself felt most palpably in the novel, thereby strengthening the implicit connection between the workings of fate and the designs of the novelist.

The subtle links between the inventor and Enricht as agents of higher forces emerge more distinctly in the English version of the novel. The long passage stating that Fate had sent the inventor in pursuit of Franz concludes with the comment that the inventor knew nothing of his assignment and never found out anything about it, "as for that matter no one else ever did, *not even*

old Enricht" (108). Nabokov added the underlined phrase to the English version, thereby underscoring the association of the two men as distinctive figures within the cast of the novel. Not only may the two be seen as agents of higher forces, they also serve as diegetic reflectors of the novel's concern with creativity and creation. Significantly, the reader notes that each of these men's creative aspirations evinces significant shortcomings, and the relative lack of success that these two diegetic creators enjoy highlights the more impressive achievement of the novel's authentic creator.

The inventor strives to create mechanical dummies endowed with the semblance of life. The shallowness of this aspiration finds its just desserts when the automannequins collapse and fall apart at the end of the novel. Enricht's creative fantasies do not fare much better: one of his constructions—a gray wig stuck on a stick with a knitted shawl that is meant to represent his wife—also collapses when Franz strikes it (229). While Enricht believes that he can transform himself into "all kinds of creatures—a horse, a hog, or a six-year-old girl in a sailor cap" (99), the reader is treated to a more sobering view of his art. At one point Franz finds Enricht clad only in his nightshirt standing on all fours "with his wrinkled and hoary rear toward a brilliant cheval glass." Whatever it is that Enricht sees at this point, the reader sees something unforgettably stark: Enricht "was peering back through the archway of his bare thighs at the reflection of his bleak buttocks" (87). Later the reader learns that Enricht believes that "the whole world was but a trick of his" and that everyone in it, including Franz, Martha, and Dreyer, are merely his creations (227). However, when he tries to dismiss Franz with the exclamation, "You no longer exist, Franz Bubendorf" (229) the reader knows that Franz does continue to exist for two more chapters, until he is dismissed by his actual creator, the novelist himself.

Neither the inventor's desire to create an artifice that slavishly mirrors life nor Enricht's solipsistic fantasies of self-transformation have an enduring impact. Standing in sharp contrast to these would-be creators, however, looms the author who has created them both, and Nabokov's revision of the novel brings out the power and the presence of the author in high relief. This revision, which Nabokov completed during the later stages of his career, reflects his long experience as a maker of fiction. Nabokov charges the English version both with pointed literary allusions (as when Dreyer reads a German translation of Gogol's novel *Dead Souls* [43]), and with veiled autoreferences: the photographer who captures Dreyer's image on film is anagramatically named Vivian Badlook (153), while a certain Blavdak Vinomori appears (complete with wife and butterfly net) as a guest at the hotel where Martha plots Dreyer's murder. While the presence of a diegetic representative of the author is suggested in the Russian version of the novel, the English-language version spotlights the entrance of the author onto the stage where the fates of his protagonists are decided. Referring to this incident in his foreword to the

English-language edition, Nabokov comments: "the appearances of my wife and me in the last two chapters are merely visits of inspection" (viii).

Even myopic Franz senses something uncanny in the presence of this enigmatic figure in his world, and he seethes with resentment. At one point he has the impression that the man and his companion are talking about him: "It embarrassed, it incensed him, that this damned happy foreigner . . . knew absolutely everything about his predicament and perhaps pitied, not without some derision, an honest young man who had been seduced and appropriated by an older woman" (259). Franz's perception here offers one of the earliest examples in Nabokov's fiction of a literary character sensing the power of its maker (or its maker's diegetic stand-in), although Franz cannot grasp the underlying reality of this situation. It is worth noting that when Nabokov revised the novel for publication in English, he added material indicating some reciprocal feeling on the part of Franz's creator. Commenting on Franz's reaction to the foreign couple, the narrative states: "Franz felt envious of that unusual pair, so envious that his oppression, *one is sorry to say*, grew even more bitter . . ." (254). The underlined phrase, which does not appear in the Russian original, seems to indicate the narrator's regret over the fact that his presence adds to Franz's bitterness. The tone of this narrative aside may remind some readers of comments made by the narrator of *Pnin* about that novel's protagonist.

It is a distinctive sign of the author's strength that his characters literally seem to go to pieces when their creator enters their realm at the end of the novel. The inventor's dummies collapse or grind to a halt, Martha dies, Dreyer appears to Franz not as a familiar figure but as "a demented stranger in a rumpled open shirt" (271), and Franz himself dissolves into such a hysteria of relief that a neighbor hears "what sounded like several revellers all talking together, and roaring with laughter, and interrupting one another, and roaring again in a frenzy of young mirth" (272).

In the revised version of the novel Nabokov paves the way for the eventual emergence of an authorial surrogate at the end of *King, Queen, Knave* by inserting a series of references to a new cinema house being constructed near the building in which Franz finds an apartment. The construction of the cinema house progresses in step with the unfolding of Nabokov's novel. At the end of the novel, the cinema is ready to house the première of a film entitled *King, Queen, Knave*, which is based on a famous play by Goldemar. Nabokov perhaps alludes to the fact that the construction of the cinema reflects the development of his literary text when he states in his foreword to the English version that the novel was "constructed" in Berlin in the winter of 1927–28 (vii). As critics such as Grayson and Proffer have pointed out, Nabokov's revisions not only tighten the work in terms of plot and characterization, they significantly expand the richness of its literary and metaliterary allusiveness.

The changes wrought in the 1974 film version of the novel, however, tend to work in the opposite direction. Directed by the noted Polish director Jerzy

Skolimowski, the film stars David Niven, Gina Lollobrigida, and John Moulder-Brown. With this international cast, the film alters the time of the action and the nationality of the central characters: Curt Dreyer (Niven) and his nephew Frank (Moulder-Brown) are British, and Martha Dreyer is an Italian woman whom Dreyer met after World War II. While roughly following Nabokov's story line, the script by David Seltzer and David Shaw condenses the plot and brings the characters closer together; the inventor shares a room next to Frank Dreyer at Enricht's flat. This change facilitates a crucial emendation to Nabokov's story. After Martha dies, and Frank seems ready to enjoy the financial favors of his grieving uncle, the inventor steps forward as an unwitting agent of retribution. The final scene in the film depicts the inventor bringing to Dreyer's house a new automannequin, one that is the spitting image of Frank's mistress, who, unbeknownst to the inventor, was Martha herself. While the film has its amusing moments, Nabokov's dry wit and subtle irony often lie buried in scenes of slapstick action and forced hilarity. Although *King, Queen, Knave* is not one of Nabokov's major novels, the film version does not convey the scope or breadth of Nabokov's distinctive vision. One cannot discern in the film the outlines of those unique traits that become the hallmark of Nabokov's mature fiction.

Julian W. Connolly

NOTES

1. Tsetlin, 1928, p. 536.
2. G. Ivanov, p. 234.
3. Struve, 1967, p. 51; Appel, 1974, p. 109; see also Field, 1967, p. 153.
4. See, e.g. Tsetlin, 1928, p. 537 and Hyde, p. 48.
5. Rampton, 1984, p. 16.
6. See Hyde, p. 44 and Toker, 1989, p. 48; see also Boyd, 1990, p. 280.
7. Boyd, 1990, p. 281.
8. Grayson, p. 107; Proffer, 1970, p. 301.

LAUGHTER IN THE DARK

The novel which Nabokov revised most extensively in translation from Russian to English is *Laughter in the Dark*. Written in 1931 and published first in the Russian émigré journal *Sovremennye zapiski* with the title *Camera Obscura* (1932–33) and then as a book with the title *Kamera obskura* (1933), the novel was translated into English by Winifred Roy and published with the title *Camera Obscura* in 1936.[1] Roy's translation introduced some changes into Nabokov's text, but when Nabokov himself approached the task of translating

his work just a short time later (*Laughter in the Dark* appeared in 1938), he changed his novel in significant ways. He gave the central characters new names, he deleted a long description of a cartoon character named Cheepy (or Cheapy), and he changed the manner in which his protagonist discovers his mistress's infidelity. In subsequent editions of the work, a few further changes were introduced.[2] The following discussion will refer primarily to *Laughter in the Dark*, with commentary on *Kamera obskura* where appropriate.

Despite the transformations Nabokov worked on his Russian original, the outlines of the central plot remain fixed. A married man, named Krechmar (Kretschmar) in the Russian version and Albert Albinus in Nabokov's English version, becomes obsessed with a young woman named Magda (Margot in English). She in turn had been the lover of an artist named in the Russian version as Robert Gorn (Horn) and in the revised English version as Axel Rex. The former lovers renew their relationship and deceive Albinus/Krechmar until he inadvertently discovers their infidelity through conversations with a writer (named Zegel'krants [Segelkranz] in the Russian version and Udo Conrad in the English version). Confused and angry, Albinus wrecks his car and is blinded in the crash. Unbeknownst to Albinus, Rex continues his relationship with Margot while she looks after Albinus in a Swiss chalet. After his brother-in-law Paul (Maks [Max] in the Russian version) rescues Albinus from this situation, the blind man returns to the care of his wife Elisabeth (Anneliza [Anneliese] in Russian), until he finds an opportunity to confront Margot in his old apartment. Drawing a gun, he struggles with Margot, but it is he who is shot during the fray. The novel concludes with Albinus dying and Margot escaping once again. This series of events and Nabokov's handling of them led Anthony Burgess to call *Laughter in the Dark* "rather a nasty little story."[3] Another reviewer termed Nabokov a "cruel" writer.[4] Nabokov himself said that he "saw the world as cruel" during the time when he wrote the novel.[5] Nonetheless, the novel does have its bright spots as shall be noted below.

The presence of the central triangle involving obsessive desire in the novel encourages some critics to see an affinity between this work and *King, Queen, Knave*. Nikolai Andreev, writing in the émigré journal *Volia Rossii* in 1932, noted that the theme of the novel proceeds along the lines of *King, Queen, Knave*, while Andrew Field states that the work could be profitably thought of as an adaptation or free translation from the Russian of *King, Queen, Knave*.[6]

On the other hand, both the adulterous triangle and Albinus's sad fate have many antecedents in literature besides *King, Queen, Knave*. In the revised English version of the novel, Nabokov's narrator himself touches upon this. He begins with a synopsis of Albinus's life, highlighting as he does so its conventional, fable-like quality: "Once upon a time there lived in Berlin, Germany, a man called Albinus. He was rich, respectable, happy; one day he abandoned his wife for the sake of a youthful mistress; he loved; was not loved; and his life ended in disaster" (7). In the next paragraph, however, the narrator goes on to display a most Nabokovian concern for the texture of the narrative

process itself: "This is the whole of the story and we might have left it at that had there not been profit and pleasure in the telling." He concludes: "although there is plenty of space on a gravestone to contain, bound in moss, the abridged version of a man's life, detail is always welcome" (7). Indeed, it is in the details of Nabokov's narrative that the originality of the novel (and its difference from *King, Queen, Knave*) emerges.

Departing from the model of *King, Queen, Knave*, Nabokov balances the tawdry, destructive triangle of *Laughter in the Dark* with a secondary triangle of more sympathetic figures: Albinus's wife Elisabeth, his brother-in-law Paul, and his daughter Irma. Moreover, Nabokov utilizes a new approach to the depiction of characters and action in this novel. As many critics have pointed out, the novel appropriates cinematic motifs, imagery, and point of view.[7] Nabokov himself stated that he wished "to write the entire book as if it were a film,"[8] and commentators have tried to define the effect this technique has on the reader. Noting Brian Boyd's observation that Nabokov "enjoyed the grotesqueness of cinematic cliché,"[9] one can see in Nabokov's handling of personality and plot an attempt to expose the vulgar conventionality of the protagonists' aspirations by linking them with the characters and plots of popular film. Alfred Appel, Jr., provides a succinct formulation of this design when he writes that the cast of the novel "inhabits a cinematic plot equal to their own shortsightedness, banality, or corruption."[10] Commenting later on his approach to characterization, Nabokov seemed to lament the degree to which he succeeded in his aims; he called his protagonists "hopeless clichés," and he termed the work his "poorest novel."[11]

In its manipulation of cinematic motifs, *Laughter in the Dark* affirms a basic truth in Nabokov's fiction: those who live their lives through the derivative patterns of conventional art display both a poverty of the imagination and a sterility of the soul. This is especially true of the central figures of Albinus and Margot. Albinus's behavior has prompted both a character within the novel and readers outside the novel to identify his conduct as an illustration of the adage "Love is blind" (see 185). However, it is not merely the blindness of sexual desire that engages Nabokov's interest in this novel. He exposes a larger failure of vision—the failure to observe or examine the rich fabric of life itself. Albinus does not pay attention to the minutiae of experience which can render one's life precious, unique, and full of wonder.

Nabokov lays bare this failure of vision in several ways. Perhaps the broadest form it assumes is Albinus's inability to distinguish the authentic from the false. Although he regards himself as "an art critic and picture expert" (8), he does not realize that his own picture collection contains not only some "fine painting," but also "a sprinkling of fakes," including one by Axel Rex (146). Albinus's penchant for overlooking the authentic in favor of a manufactured substitute shows up in his general view of the world around him. The reader learns that Albinus amuses himself by looking at the surrounding landscapes as if they were drawn by an Old Master. The narrator comments:

"it turned his existence into a fine picture gallery—delightful fakes, all of them" (8). This form of amusement has serious consequences: placing Albinus at an aesthetic remove from life, it distances him from authentic experience—the pain of life as well as its pleasures—and renders him unable to discriminate between the sham and the genuine.

The narrator goes on to disparage Albinus's faculties in a series of narrative asides. On the second page of the novel, he asserts that Albinus "was not a particularly gifted man" (8); later he states that Albinus had "a slowish mind" (14); and finally, the narrator endorses Margot's angry charge that Albinus is "a liar, a coward and a fool" with the parenthetical aside that she had thus summed him up "rather neatly" (54). Even the artistic scheme which leads Albinus to establish contact with Axel Rex has a derivative quality. Albinus envisions beginning a film with a shot of a well-known picture such as a Dutch genre painting and then setting it into motion; after the figures in the painting move around for a bit, they would settle back down into the initial position. This scheme, which has the effect merely of shuffling figures about in a way that demeans both the original work of art and life itself, is not Albinus's own: the idea sprang from a phrase in one of Udo Conrad's books.

In one of the novel's many ironies the reader is informed that Albinus's most "brilliant" discovery is Margot herself, but of course, she is perhaps the greatest fake of all within the world of the text. Described as having been a "bright and high-spirited girl" (25), she grows up to be a remarkably meretricious and calculating young woman who has one consuming ambition: to live the life of a glamorous film star. Enraptured by this dream, she narcissistically imagines herself enacting scenes appropriate to the calling. While modelling for art students, for example, she indulges in a "vision of herself as a screen beauty in gorgeous furs being helped out of a gorgeous car by a gorgeous hotel porter under a giant umbrella" (30). Years later, while seated between Albinus and Rex at dinner she feels "as though she were the chief actress in a mysterious and passionate film-drama," and she "tried to behave accordingly" (147).

Her penchant for melodramatic posturing generally has the desired effect on Albinus. When she wishes to manipulate him into feeling pity for her, she invents a tale of child abuse and persecution. At one point during this episode the narrator deftly exposes the wretched artifice in Margot's performance. Observing that she smiled through her tears, he comments that this "was difficult, seeing there were no tears to smile through" (100).

As the narrative ultimately reveals, however, Margot's success in affecting Albinus has less to do with her actual talent for acting than it does with Albinus's fundamental gullibility and his inability to perceive the sham for what it is. When Albinus provides Margot with the opportunity to demonstrate her skills in a genuine film, she turns out to be a wretched actress, as she herself is dismayed to discover. Nabokov's handling of this moment provides a crisp illustration of a recurring disparity his work exposes between one's internal self-image and the image one presents to the external world. Margot,

who had felt during the filming that she had "acted beautifully" (124), is horrified at what she sees on the screen: "Who on earth was that ghastly creature? . . . That monster on the screen had nothing in common with her—she was awful, awful!" (187). Characteristically, Albinus is unaware of or unmoved by Margot's distress. He is "enchanted" with the performance, for the screening brings to mind his first meeting with Margot at the cinema (188).

Nabokov's choice of a movie house as the site for Albinus's and Margot's first encounter demonstrates his skill in the utilization of the cinema motif, particularly in his revised English version. While both the Russian and English versions of the novel share the locale's general emblematic significance—a realm of darkness where projection and illusion replace quotidian reality—the English version makes more pointed use of the locale's potential for intratextual referentiality.

Upon his first visit to the movie house (ironically named "Argus" after the mythological herdsman with eyes all over his body), Albinus sees a poster depicting a man looking up at a window which frames a girl in a nightshirt (20–21; the poster in the Russian version depicts a fireman carrying a woman with yellow hair). Although this means nothing to Albinus, the reader will remember the poster later when reading about Irma standing at an open window on a frigid night and gazing into the darkness to see if her father is standing below. It is Albinus's abandonment of the family which leads Irma to this action, and it is her exposure to the icy night that leads to her death. Thus the poster stands as a mute warning to Albinus as he considers entering the Argus cinema. His inability to fathom any meaning from this poster or from the film fragments he sees inside contrasts sharply with the uncanny psychic vision his abandoned wife later experiences.

Once Albinus enters the movie house, the fragments of film which he glimpses have (in the English version of the novel) a direct personal relevance, but again, blinded as he is by his own immediate desires, he cannot understand the import of what he sees nor does he make any attempt to do so. Indeed, the narrative's first reference to action on the screen addresses the very issue of Albinus's lack of interest in exploring context or causality. The narrator states: "He had come in at the end of a film: a girl was receding among tumbled furniture before a masked man with a gun" (20). This scene provides a proleptic glance toward the end of the novel, where Albinus, masked by blindness, advances on Margot with his gun, and momentarily becomes entangled in a chair that she had thrown at him (291). (The Russian version is somewhat less pointed. A literal translation would read: "someone with large shoulders was blindly walking toward a woman moving backwards," 14.) Significantly, the narrative continues: "There was no interest whatever in watching happenings which he could not understand since he had not yet seen their beginning" (20). This, of course, is highly ironic, since Albinus himself is at the beginning of happenings which will turn out to be quite similar.

Perhaps if he chose to watch the entire film, he would be presented with a scenario that might caution him about the consequences of his own behavior.

This episode takes on further irony when Margot is later depicted play-acting in front of her mirror. There she would "make all sorts of wonderful faces . . . or recoil before the barrel of an imaginary revolver" (69). Margot's exercises please her enormously, for she feels that she simpers and sneers "as well as any screen actress," and they perhaps prepare her for the scene which concludes the novel. Unlike Albinus, she may know precisely how to "act" in that last scene.

The second film fragment that Albinus sees in the English version proves just as pertinent to his destiny as the first. Returning to the movie theater to see Margot once again, he is already caught up in the inexorable drive to meet and possess this unknown woman, and the film excerpt he glimpses provides an apt image of his emotional condition: "A car was spinning down a smooth road with hairpin turns between cliff and abyss" (22). Albinus is already out of control, and disaster looms around the very next corner. It often happens in Nabokov's works that an image which a character encounters or envisions at one point in his life comes back to haunt that character at a subsequent moment. Later in this novel it will be Albinus's own car that spins out of control and results in the crash which transforms his emotional and moral blindness into physical blindness as well. The power of this image in *Laughter in the Dark* far outstrips the corresponding images in *Kamera obskura*. There Albinus first sees the cartoon character Cheepy performing a Russian ballet and then watches a film of Japanese life entitled "When Cherries Blossom" (15).

The stirrings of destructive potential suggested in the images of a masked man with a gun and of a car careening out of control have already been triggered within Albinus by his silent encounter with the figure of Margot. The first chapter concludes with Albinus thinking to himself that "you can't take a pistol and plug a girl you don't even know, simply because she attracts you" (13). This vision of killing Margot (which is echoed on page 23) finds an intriguing counterpoint later in the novel when Albinus is overwhelmed by a desire to make love to Margot in his bedroom and thinks that afterwards he will kill himself (62). G. M. Hyde has pointed out that Albinus's obsession with Margot recalls the dilemma faced by the hero of Tolstoy's late story "The Devil."[12] Both Albinus and Irtenev are married to kind and sensitive women who love them deeply (in both cases, the women's names are variations on "Liza"), and both men are horrified to find themselves inexorably drawn to a woman who seems wanton and playful. Yet the similarities between the texts do not end there. Both Margot and Tolstoy's Stepanida are associated in their lovers' minds with the color red, and in both works, the motif of blindness makes an appearance (while rushing to find Stepanida, Irtenev loses his pince-nez). Even the contradictory impulses toward violence that Albinus feels when he encounters Margot are anticipated in Tolstoy. The latter wrote two endings

for his tale. In one version, Irtenev kills Stepanida; in the other, he kills himself. Similarly, Albinus first considers killing Margot, and he later considers killing himself. Ironically, this contradictory impulse finds synthesis when Albinus attempts to kill Margot but ends up being killed instead.

Albinus's relationship with Margot is charged not only with currents of obsessive desire; Nabokov designs their affair to suggest a grotesque parody of the sacred parent-child relationship. A scene at the beach illustrates this point. Albinus, who had earlier dreamed of encountering "a young girl lying asprawl on a hot lonely beach" (17), now has the opportunity of living such a moment with Margot. Typically, in his obsession with Margot he remains oblivious to the rest of the outside world: "Albinus saw her figure framed in the gay pattern of the beach; a pattern he hardly saw, so entirely was his gaze concentrated on Margot" (113). Then, as he begins to frolic with her in the water, an Englishwoman resting nearby misinterprets the relationship and says to her husband: "Look at that German romping about *with his daughter*. Now, don't be so lazy, William. Take the children out for a good swim" (114, emphasis added).

The Englishwoman's mistake not only underscores the disparity in age between Albinus and Margot, it reminds the reader that Albinus is not playing with his actual daughter but rather that he has abandoned that child for his youthful mistress. This evocation of abandonment finds a more somber realization some time later, after Irma has died. Irma's death leads Albinus to consider for the first time during his affair with Margot the "turpitude" which had settled upon his life (177). He realizes that "fate" seemed to be urging him to come to his senses and to return to his wife. He knows that if he were to attend Irma's funeral, he would remain with his wife forever. However, as he enters Irma's former nursery, a mental eclipse occurs: "instead of thinking of his child he saw another figure, a graceful, lively, wanton girl, laughing, leaning over the table" (178). The substitution of Margot for Irma is complete, and Albinus rejects the call of fate to return to his wife.

Margot's usurpation of Irma's place in Albinus's life later finds confirmation when he consoles the woman after the failure of her film and uses "the very words with which he had once comforted Irma" (192). Some readers have seen in Albinus's relationship to Margot a foreshadowing of Humbert Humbert's relationship to Lolita in *Lolita*; both relationships raise the specter of incest through the pattern of child-parent imagery. Yet while Nabokov himself acknowledged an affinity between Margot and Lolita, he properly went on to contrast the two figures, saying that Margot was "a common young whore" and not "an unfortunate little Lolita" (*SO* 83). Indeed, while *Laughter in the Dark* separates the figure of mistress (Margot) and injured child (Irma), Lolita conflates the two: Dolores Haze becomes both mistress and abused child.

Albinus soon suffers the consequences of his obsession with Margot. His blindness, and the sadistic mistreatment he receives from Margot and Rex in the Swiss chalet, have the effect of softening somewhat the disdain one might

feel toward the character. Yet this shift in the novel's treatment of Albinus does not lessen the character's burden of guilt for his conduct toward his wife and daughter. Rather, the episode of the Swiss chalet serves to point out a form of moral darkness that is more sinister and cruel than Albinus's self-absorption and insensitivity. This is the moral darkness displayed by Axel Rex. Rex is not insensitive or oblivious to the pain he inflicts on others. On the contrary, he relishes the spectacle of another's suffering. His conduct deserves closer scrutiny.

In both the Russian and English versions of the novel, the account of Rex's childhood exposes a raw streak of sadism in the character. For example, he used to pour oil over live mice and then set fire to them. His treatment of Albinus at the Swiss chalet indicates that he never outgrew this predilection. Even so, the narrator asserts in *Laughter in the Dark* that "this dangerous man was, with pencil in hand, a very fine artist indeed" (143). What is the reader to make of this comment? Does the narrator mean to suggest that one can or should draw a line between ethics and aesthetics? Probably not.

Indeed, as the narrative goes on to provide examples of Rex's "art," it is clear that the epithet "fine" rings with a certain degree of irony (one recalls that this epithet is applied to Albinus's art collection, which contains "some *fine* painting" and "a sprinkling of fakes" [146], as well as to Albinus's habit of seeing the world around him as a series of landscapes by Old Masters, thereby turning his existence into a "*fine* picture gallery" [8]). The narrative states that Rex's understanding of the art of caricature rested on a contrast between "cruelty" on one side and "credulity" on the other: "if, in real life, Rex looked on without stirring a finger while a blind beggar . . . was about to sit down on a freshly painted bench, he was only deriving inspiration for his next little picture" (144). What is noteworthy here is Rex's failure to prevent the blind man from sitting on the bench. It is one thing to conceptualize a misfortune and to depict it in the fictive world of a cartoon, but it is quite another to stand by passively and watch such a misfortune unfold in the "real" life without forestalling its completion. Rex's notion of "inspiration" is fatally corrupted with a cold seed of sadism lying at its core.

While Nabokov's treatment of Axel Rex foregrounds the issue of the relationship between artistic technique and ethical concern in the novel, his handling of the other artist figure in the text develops the subject further. In both *Kamera obskura* and *Laughter in the Dark*, it is a writer who makes Kretschmar/Albinus aware of the infidelity of his mistress, although the way in which this occurs differs significantly from one version to the other. This divergence merits examination. Dietrich Segelkranz, the writer in *Kamera obskura*, is described as an imitator of Marcel Proust (143), and Kretschmar complains that his work "gets lost in the labyrinths of complex psychology" (90). Udo Conrad, on the other hand, is characterized by Albinus as an author "with exquisite vision and a divine style" but who "has a contempt for social problems" (132); Conrad himself expresses disdain for "Freudian novels" and

for literature that subsists on "Life and Lives" (216). This amalgam of traits has led some commentators to claim that Conrad serves as a kind of "authorial self-portrait."[13] In both cases, Nabokov utilizes the figure of the writer to explore a central issue—the relationship between an author's work and his awareness of pain and suffering in life.

Kretschmar learns of his mistress's deception when Segelkranz reads a long excerpt from a work in progress: in the dialogue between two lovers conversing in a dentist's office, Kretschmar recognizes the voices of Magda and Horn, who were overheard by Segelkranz on a train several days earlier. This discovery leads Kretschmar onto the path of events resulting in his automobile accident and blindness. When Segelkranz realizes that he had unwittingly triggered Kretschmar's misfortune by reading his manuscript to the man, he feels deep remorse, and he tears the manuscript up so violently that he nearly dislocates his fingers; he also suffers from terrible nightmares (177). The episode provides him with a costly lesson—that one should not attempt to preserve the fleeting experiences of life by transcribing them directly, without transformation, into the literary work. He is crushed by his sense of guilt.

In *Laughter in the Dark*, however, Conrad does not convey Margot and Rex's conversation through the medium of the written word. He merely announces that he overheard their conversation, and when Albinus subsequently presses him to disclose its contents, he says that it consisted of the "cheapest, loudest, nastiest amorous prattle" that he had ever heard (221). After Albinus responds to this disclosure by abruptly departing, Conrad muses: "I wonder whether I haven't committed some blunder (. . . nasty rhyme, that! 'Was it, I wonder, a—*la*, la, la—*blun*der?' Horrible!)" (222). Whereas Segelkranz reacts to his sense of culpability by experiencing extreme remorse, Conrad shies away from any acknowledgment of personal responsibility by turning his attention to the aesthetics of an awkward rhyme. With this episode Nabokov provides two alternative responses to the question of how an artist might deal with the specter of pain and suffering in life. Segelkranz plunges into a hyperbolic expression of guilt and remorse, while Conrad retreats into aesthetic detachment.

While the writer figures operating on the *diegetic* level of the novel present two opposing approaches to the problem of human suffering, the writer who operates on the *extradiegetic* level—Nabokov himself—offers yet a third alternative. This alternative neither indulges in excessive emotionalism nor seeks to escape emotional engagement by turning to aesthetic play. We see this third alternative displayed in several places in the novel, but it appears most clearly in Nabokov's handling of Albinus's accident and of Albinus's subsequent discovery that he is blind. In both cases, Nabokov leads the reader up to the climactic moment in gradual steps, only to turn away at the last moment. This last-minute aversion of narrative attention, however, does not represent the kind of retreat into aesthetic detachment evident in Conrad's reflection on

a wretched rhyme. Nabokov does not seek to distract the reader from the seriousness of what is occurring. Indeed, his detailed account of Albinus's desperate attempts to find rational explanations for the fact that he cannot see (he considers every possibility but the inevitable one) may make some readers squirm with discomfort. Yet this method *does* eschew the kind of sadistic voyeurism exhibited by Axel Rex in his art and in his life. Nabokov carefully sets the stage on which a scene of high pathos will occur, but he allows his readers to fill in the emotional content.

The ethos of sensitivity and tact which informs Nabokov's narrative treatment of human suffering is also shared by the three characters in the work who stand as a contrast to the Albinus–Margot–Rex triangle. Irma demonstrates a spirit of selflessness and compassion which seems absent in her father. On the night she catches her fatal cold by standing in front of an open window to see if her father has come to the house, she is disappointed that the man on the street outside is not her father, but she "felt sorry" for that man anyway (160). This little girl also exhibits a rare faculty that marks her as a Nabokovian favorite. As the narrative puts it: "It was just a quiet delight in one's own existence with a faint note of humorous surprise at being alive at all—yes, that was the tenor of it: mortal gaiety" (18). Unlike her father, Irma does not need the stimulation of an illicit relationship to take pleasure in the mere fact of being alive.

Although he may not manifest the same spirit of "mortal gaiety," Albinus's reserved brother-in-law Paul also knows how to cherish things of value in life. Just as Elisabeth feels that her marriage is "a very special, precious and pure tie that could never be broken" (70), so, too, does Paul believe that his sister's "married happiness was to him a sacred thing" (71). Nonetheless, even after Albinus has trampled on this sacred bond and abandoned Elisabeth and Irma, Paul feels compassion for his brother-in-law's potential suffering. At one point he "pictured to himself" Albinus alone at the mercy of his dangerous mistress "in the black house of his blindness" (273). He then rescues the man from his diabolical persecutors.

It is noteworthy, however, that this rescue mission itself seems to be launched by Elisabeth. When Paul returns home one evening he finds her packing a bag. He asks whether she is going anywhere, she responds "You are" (274). In this incident one detects the workings of a special talent attributed to Elisabeth earlier in the novel—a kind of intuition or "second sight" that enables her to sense the sufferings of another even at a distance. Although mention is made of an "almost telepathic sensibility" which had developed in Elisabeth since her separation from her husband (155), Nabokov delves into this sensitivity in a chapter that stands out in the novel for its unique manipulation of narrative perspective. In this chapter Nabokov's narrative focus moves through an astonishing series of visual perspectives. He begins with the point of view of an old woman on a hillside looking down at the road where Albinus's car is about to encounter two cyclists. Then he shifts to the

perspective of a pilot who can see the road as he flies high above it. Finally, he moves even further, from France to Berlin, where Elisabeth stands on her balcony, feeling an unaccountable discomfort. After pausing to record her sensations, the narrative sweeps back from Berlin to the south of France, gliding smoothly over the airplane to come to rest again in the figure of the old woman gathering herbs on the hillside.

Nabokov's fluid manipulation of perspective here is not meant to be a gratuitous display of narrative versatility. Rather, the conjoining of multiple perspectives and multiple locations in one instant of time hints at a privileged mode of perception celebrated elsewhere in Nabokov's work.[14] While it is perhaps impossible for ordinary mortals to achieve this kind of multidimensional insight on a permanent basis and still remain mortal, Nabokov's favorite characters are able to experience it intermittently (see, for example, Fyodor's experience of "multilevel thinking" in *The Gift*, 163), and it perhaps heralds a state of being that humans may attain after death (see Boyd's analysis of this possibility in Chapter Five of his monograph on *Ada*). The fact that Nabokov places Elisabeth at the center of this panoptic survey in *Laughter in the Dark* is a sign of the special status she enjoys in the work.

The status accorded Elisabeth, however, contrasts markedly with that given to Albinus, Rex, or Margot. In addition to the cinematic motifs discussed earlier, Nabokov deploys a series of other images to trace the outlines of these characters' limitations. For example, both Albinus and Rex are linked to puppets or dolls. After Albinus has been shot at the end of *Laughter in the Dark*, the narrator states that his body "fell, like a big, soft doll" to one side (292). This image faintly echoes the description of Rex leaning out of the window of the Swiss chalet to hail the arrival of Margot and Albinus. There the "droll gestures of greeting" he makes to Margot spur the narrator to comment that this "was a capital imitation of Punch" (253).

The association forged between Rex and a puppet figure is especially significant in *Laughter in the Dark* because Rex fancies himself in quite a different role at the theater. In an important passage that outlines Rex's inflated self-image, the narrator asserts that when talking about a book, Rex had the "pleasant feeling" that he was "the partner of . . . the author of the book" (182). Likewise, when he anticipates tormenting Albinus, Rex imagines that he has a reserved space "in the stage manager's private box" (183). This stage manager, as Rex envisions him, is "an elusive, double, triple, self-reflecting magic Proteus of a phantom . . . the ghost of a juggler on a shimmering curtain" (183). The description of the stage manager of Rex's imagination may remind some readers of Nabokov himself. Consequently, Rex's belief that he is the favorite of such a stage manager (and the partner of a book's author) represents an intriguing form of hubris on the part of a literary character. It should be no surprise, then, that Rex is ultimately punished.

Not only are his actions characterized as "a capital imitation of Punch," but his attempts to direct Albinus's torture at the Swiss chalet find an abrupt

rebuttal when Paul shows up and begins thrashing him with a cane. The description of this punishment involves one of the most important image systems in Nabokov's work—the image of Paradise. The scene concludes: "suddenly something very remarkable occurred: like Adam after the Fall, Rex, cowering by the white wall and grinning wanly, covered his nakedness with his hand" (278). Rex's pretensions to the power of the creator are unmasked, and the last view of him in the novel depicts him once again framed in the window, just as he was when Albinus and Margot first arrived at the chalet.

The image of frames and framing also plays a significant role in *Laughter in the Dark*, as it does in other Nabokov works (see, for example, *The Defense*). Such imagery often underscores the author's powers of control over his characters: it is he who ultimately provides the frames in which they are placed. As Leona Toker and others have pointed out, doors represent one form of framing structure which appears prominently in the novel.[15] Albinus is frustrated in his pursuit of Margot by locked doors in his apartment, at the hotel in Rouginard, and at the Swiss chalet. Only after he has been shot does the door lie open, but now he is unable to make use of it. His soul, however, may finally be released from the self-imposed constrictions of his obsessive desire.

Nabokov's treatment of Albinus in *Laughter in the Dark* may represent the conclusion of one phase of character depiction in his art. After this novel, Nabokov seems less interested in focusing on talentless protagonists obsessed with the pursuit of petty goals. His depiction of Rex, however, heralds a paramount concern of his later work: the destiny of characters who possess a clear spark of artistic vision and who seek to demonstrate that artistry in the medium of life itself. Such distinctive figures as Hermann Karlovich in *Despair* and Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* represent the further evolution of character potentials found in Axel Rex. *Laughter in the Dark* may not be one of Nabokov's masterpieces, but amidst its shifting silver-screen effects one finds vibrant evidence of its author's creative gifts.

Julian W. Connolly

NOTES

1. See Boyd, 1990, p. 569 note 13, and Grayson, pp. 27–28.
2. Grayson, pp. 23–58.
3. Burgess's opinion is quoted in Page, p. 121. The original review appeared in *The Yorkshire Post*, 23 March 1961, p. 4.
4. This opinion, delivered by Martin Seymour-Smith, is quoted in Page, p. 25. David Rampton, 1984, also found "cruelty" in this novel (see pp. 23–24).
5. Smith Interview: "Vladimir Nabokov on His Life and Work," p. 858.
6. Andreev, 1932, p. 184; Field, 1967, pp. 158–59.
7. See, *inter alia*, Clancy, pp. 51–53; Rampton, 1984, pp. 20–21; and Stuart, pp. 88–106.

8. Quoted in Appel, 1974, p. 258. Incidentally, the film which was eventually made from Nabokov's novel (directed by Tony Richardson) drew stiff criticism from Nabokov for the "commonplace quality" of its "sexual passages" (*SO* 137).
9. Boyd, 1990, p. 363.
10. Appel, 1974, p. 261.
11. Quoted in Appel, 1974, p. 262.
12. Hyde, pp. 59–63.
13. Rampton, 1984, p. 23.
14. See Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 26–7, for his discussion of the concept of "cosmic synchronization."
15. See Toker, 1989, p. 114.

LECTURES ON DON QUIXOTE

Theirs was not an easygoing relationship, but neither was Don Quixote's with Sancho Panza. Sometimes it might initially have looked as though Nabokov, playing the high-minded knight, was casting Cervantes as the vulgar squire. This had some precedent, for himself at least, since—as he would tell his Wellesley classes—the Russian intelligentsia had identified with the Don when tilting at their political and ideological windmills. Turgenev, in his programmatic lecture on "Hamlet and Don Quixote," had subdivided all mankind between such introverted or else outgoing types. That dichotomy would be personified in the vacillating title-role of his *Rudin* and the doctrinaire Bazarov of his *Fathers and Children*—even perhaps in the Andrey and Pierre of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. But Nabokov had no patience with Dostoevsky's *Idiot*, whose role models were Don Quixote and Jesus Christ. Some of Nabokov's protagonists, for better or for worse, had been exposed to Cervantes: *Don Quixote*, along with *Les Misérables*, was read aloud to Humbert Humbert in childhood, and figures along with *Faust* in one of Pnin's lectures. None of those three works ranked very high in the canon of Nabokov's reactions against received opinion. Yet he had been sufficiently interested in Cervantes' novel to sketch a dramatic adaptation of it, which he proposed to the Michael Chekhov company shortly after arriving in the United States. Shades from this unrealized project may lurk in the background of his unexpected return to the subject.

In the expectation of academic employment during his American sojourn, he had sketched out a backlog of potential lectures: half of them on Russian authors, half on others not including Cervantes. The "Masters of Modern Fiction" in his popular course at Cornell were, with the Russians, Jane Austen, Dickens, Flaubert, Stevenson, Proust, Kafka, and Joyce. Living down a prejudice against lady novelists, he included *Mansfield Park* at Edmund Wilson's suggestion, and may have surprised a younger generation by relaying

to them his own youthful enthusiasm for *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. When he came back to Harvard for the spring term of 1952, it was as a visiting professor in the Slavic Department—his previous appointment having been as a research associate in the Museum of Comparative Zoology. Besides the two advanced reading courses that he would teach in Russian literature, there was another temporary opening, a large course at the introductory level under the "great books" program in General Education. This was Humanities 2, "Epic and Novel." Its first semester, treating five major epics from Homer to Milton, was—and long continued to be—taught by the eloquent classicist, John H. Finley, Jr. The reading list for the second semester consisted of six novels, proceeding from *Don Quixote* to *War and Peace*. I had been teaching this syllabus during its initiatory years; later, with an occasional change in the books assigned, other colleagues and visitors would lend it an improving hand; among them I.A. Richards and Thornton Wilder.

For his many friends and admirers in Cambridge it was a great pleasure to be seeing Volodya again, and of course I had some discussion with him about the lecturing assignment that he would be graciously taking over. Inasmuch as he had some leeway in designating the novels to be treated, and *Bleak House* was the only one that had been on both our lists, he hesitated somewhat about assigning *Don Quixote*. All of his choices at Cornell had been "modern," none of them earlier than the nineteenth century. But, since the Harvard series would be spaced out across a longer historical continuity, and since it had been the mock-heroic viewpoint that linked the novelistic mode to the epical, he was persuaded to try it our way. To his hesitations, which were not really objections, I am reported by his biographers to have said, "Harvard thinks otherwise"—to have said it "primly" according to Andrew Field, and "gravely" according to Brian Boyd.[1] But that succinct rejoinder was never spoken. In some detail I had simply told my distinguished successor how and why our students seemed to like the book, and he seems to have retrospectively reduced my explanation to a three-word dictum that sounds both dogmatic and supercilious. At all events, he was kind enough to accept it at the moment; and, according to Fredson Bowers, "agreed with this opinion so strongly that he set about preparing a series of lectures on Cervantes specifically for the course" (vii).

The preparation was as thorough and conscientious as it could be, under the ambivalent circumstances. Nabokov would be unduly hard on himself when he left a note among his papers, characterizing his "university lectures (Tolstoy, Cervantes, etc., etc.)" as "chaotic and sloppy," and declaring that they "must *never* be published."[2] Yet elsewhere, to interviewers from *The Paris Review*, he had declared his intention of publishing "a number of twenty-page essays on several works—[. . .] all based on my Cornell and Harvard lectures" (*SO* 103). And in that connection he instanced Cervantes: "I remember with delight tearing apart *Don Quixote*, a cruel and crude old book, before six hundred students in Memorial Hall, much to the horror and embarrassment

of my more conservative colleagues." Speaking for myself, I observed no signs of shock at the time. Novelists can speak with professional authority when they discuss other novelists. With James's comments on Hawthorne, Trollope's on Thackeray, or Proust's on Balzac, appreciation is heightened by a sense of affinity. Sartre's overcharged attack on Flaubert is quite another matter, and Nabokov must have found it insufferable, since he despised the one and revered the other. But that polemic raged across the battlefields of politics and psychoanalysis, spheres that hardly touched Nabokov's interests. In the sphere where he was most at home, he could critically reconsider the artistry of Cervantes. Post-modernist was bound to differ from proto-novelist; but, along with persisting reservations, there would be pertinent criticisms and unpredictable insights.

Since he was so shy as a public speaker, Nabokov wrote down his lectures and read them out; but, since they had been composed with so much care, his eyes could move freely from the text to the auditors before him. A heavily corrected manuscript, put together from earlier notes and drafts, had been neatly typed by Véra Nabokov—devoted wife, efficient secretary, shrewd manager, research and teaching assistant—and then subjected again to his numerous and often complicated revisions. It has taken some readjustments by our leading textual editor, the late Professor Bowers, to arrange this accumulation of documents in a readable sequence, as his foreword explains. The role that Nabokov played as a professor himself, through his two American decades, left some striking occupational earmarks upon his character and his work. The actor–playwright Peter Ustinov, meeting him later on as a fellow guest at the Montreux Palace Hotel, would still be struck by his "professorial affectations."[3] His four-volume edition of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, the monument of his scholarly career, outdoes and almost parodies his academic colleagues in the philological rigor of his translation and the bookish antiquarianism of his commentary. Some recollections from his own professorial years would seem to be parodied in the misadventures of his absent-minded Professor Pnin. Written soon after his Harvard lectures, his sympathetic portrayal of this quixotic figure of fun, whose comic blunders dissolve into nostalgic visions, would be regarded by Brian Boyd as "Nabokov's reply to Cervantes."[4]

All of his books, in varied but recurrent formulations, reflect and refract the expatriate destiny of living between two worlds. That situation is presented directly in *The Gift*, which looks back at the otherness of Russia, the *patrie perdue*, from a cosmopolitan outpost amid the émigré circles of Berlin. In *Pale Fire* the schizophrenic Botkin/Kinbote doubles back and forth between the campus of Wordsmith (Cornell?) University and his private mythical kingdom of Zembla. *Ada* goes farthest of all in retreating—if not altogether escaping—from this workaday world to another planet, Antiterra, where realistic compunction is outdistanced by romantic indulgence. Thus Nabokov proceeds in the opposite direction from Cervantes, though they seem to have

started out from comparable positions ("a great writer is always a great enchanter"; *LL* 5). Don Quixote, in his stubborn determination to go always by the book, is an archetype of pedantry; and excerpts from the book that did most to mislead him, *Amadis of Gaul*, plus others from the best-known English romance of chivalry, Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, were circulated among Nabokov's students to exemplify the state of mind from which Cervantes sought to disenchant his anti-hero. Nabokov, though he was not amused, was perfectly willing to share Cervantes' skepticism over the pseudo-enchantments that derange the Don. These indeed are nothing but mystifications, practical jokes that crudely and cruelly exploit his obsession, and are drawn out much too long by the Duke and Duchess, "mere enchanters, invented by the master enchanter, Cervantes" (63).

Here the repeated epithet, by associating the novelist with the very delusions he undertakes to expose, would seem to imply that enchanters are no more than tricksters. The implication was borne out when Nabokov's last Russian novella, a painfully explicit adumbration of the *Lolita* theme, unpublished in the original, was posthumously Englished as "The Enchanter." That Cervantesque title seemed to have regained its magical aura when it was applied to Nabokov himself in Denis Donoghue's collection of tributes, *The Great Enchanter*.[5] And when enchantment is so creatively defined, as an imaginative transmutation of life, then it brings us back to his main criterion for the art of storytelling. His discussion of *Don Quixote* opens with the challenging assertion that all novels are fairy tales. To look for "so-called 'real life'" in them, he categorically insists, would be a "fatal error"(1). On the other hand, it could be noted that Don Quixote's error was to believe in fairy tales, and that Cervantes' objective was to dispel them in the name of so-called real life. The title of Nabokov's first novel in English, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, ironically points to the elusiveness of its expatriate Russian protagonist. Ticking off the absurdities of the romances, Cervantes' spokesman, the Canon of Toledo, "is for truth in literature," Nabokov acknowledges, and adds "(as was Tolstoy)" (151). Realists, from Cervantes through Tolstoy, have pursued the truth through a process of disenchantment, and attained their versions of reality by stripping away the intervening illusions.

Yet even Cervantes had come to terms with illusion when he allowed his knight to descend so enigmatically into the Cave of Montesinos. As for Nabokov, he lost no opportunity to glory in the fictitiousness of fiction. If he overstated its otherworldliness, he did so for sound pedagogical reasons, because he was framing his remarks for a body of ingenuous and unspecialized undergraduates, and was anxious to help them adapt themselves to the special conditions of literary experience. He might have been fairer to himself if he had echoed a sentence of Dickens that prefaces *Bleak House*: "I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things." But, in equal fairness, a counterclaim might have been put forward on Cervantes' behalf: to have purposely dwelt upon the familiar side of romantic things. The pivotal

position of *Don Quixote* was made clear when Nabokov, summing up his introduction, described it as "our training ground for learning methods of approach to Dickens, Flaubert, et cetera" (1). And training, as is evident from the record, was a duty that he took very seriously. He was fortunate—rather more so than we had been, when the course was first laid out—that a dependable translation in modern English had appeared not long afterward: Samuel Putnam's in 1949. (At the outset we had been handicapped by the single available reprint, the facetious eighteenth-century rendering of Pierre Motteux. In 1950 the choice was broadened by another useful version, the Penguin edition of J.M. Cohen.)

Nabokov, for all his polyglot gifts and cosmopolite links, had little or no exposure to the Spanish language or culture, and was not inclined to consult Cervantes' text with a dictionary. Hence, in his continual reversion to quotations and close readings, it is Putnam on whom he ordinarily depends. He had done a fair amount of homework among the more accessible commentators—whom he terms "Cervantesists," characteristically coining his own rendition of *Cervantistas*, which is normally and less awkwardly rendered by "Cervantists." Aubrey Bell, Rudolph Schevill, and Salvador de Madariaga are cited and engaged in occasional argument. Other critics from outside the Hispanic field are cavalierly put down: Sir Herbert Grierson is "a scream" and his article is "trashy" (52), while Joseph Wood Krutch is the butt of an apparently irresistible pun ("who needs one," 48). Professor Nabokov never forgets that he is addressing a class ("Harvard students, of course, do *not* skim," 35) or that the classroom hour is passing (marginal reminders indicate the timing). Even his asides to the "ungentle reader" are carefully written out. In working up the material, he was systematic if quirky. We know that he prepared himself by setting down a hundred pages of detailed synopsis with full and frequent quotation, which Bowers has transcribed as "Narrative and Commentary." Now and then he balks at "the usual story"; once he dismisses it as "idiotic" (203); and a climactic confrontation so disappoints him that he is momentarily tempted to rewrite it: "A very poor scene. The author is tired."

He ended by devoting six lectures to *Don Quixote*, one more than had been previously scheduled in the course. Cut off from the actual Castilian, from the voices, idioms, and echoes of that "very serious, high-sounding, slight, and imaginary story" ("gravissima, altisonante, minima, e imaginada historia"), he would not convey much impression of its style. But he was always ready for a digression on his own adopted language, or possibly another consultation with *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. If he glosses over the stylistics, he casts a highly experienced eye on the structural devices of narrative technique. Inevitably he must take his point of departure from the *dramatis personae*, the comedy team of master and man. Neither strikes him as the least bit funny, though he will sooner or later accept Don Quixote as a sympathetic individual, while renouncing Sancho Panza as a philistine type, whose incessant proverbs fill the air with the vapors of boredom. The knight's first sally is more

acceptable than those that follow because it is unaccompanied. The novel itself was conceived and undertaken as no more than "a long short story, providing amusement for an hour or two," in Nabokov's view, which makes no allowance for the dramatic skit upon which it was modelled (28). To extend it to book length, and then to a whole second volume, was to repeat the same theme and exhaust its conceivable variations, taxing the writer's ingenuity while tiring the reader's endurance—the reader, in this case, being a writer himself, with a flair for setting up one surprise after another.

Nor is Nabokov diverted when Cervantes tries to diversify his formulaic story line by interpolating other stories. The centerpiece among the many recounted in Part One, "The Curious Impertinent," strikes him as a piece of "incredible nonsense," which has nothing to do with the main plot (143). Yet its emphasis on jealous suspicion would seem to counterpoint the prevailing tone of simple-minded credulity; and it is surprising that, though Nabokov will discern "an almost Proustian note" in Sancho Panza's island adventure, he sees no prefiguration of Albertine in Camila (72). He might have had more to say for these "inset tales" if he had considered the shorter fiction of Cervantes' *Exemplary Novels*, and had responded sympathetically to the colloquy of the dogs, the encounter of the two juvenile delinquents, or—even more brittle than his own heroes—the glass licentiate. As an accomplished technician, he is fascinated by the interlocking planes of successive narration, starting from the apocryphal Cid Hamete, turning up other manuscripts as the text moves along, contending with the spurious sequel by "Avellaneda," and making incidental storytellers out of the active characters. But he is merely bored by the fictional conventions that Cervantes was poking fun at, by the pastoral even more than by the chivalric. He does not have much faith in the book's avowed satirical purpose, which could be a rationalization to appease contemporary moralists; Cervantes may be more himself, as Madariaga suggested, when carried away by imaginative flights that he professed to discredit.

If one does not happen to be much concerned with the issues of some particular satire, one may well be overimpressed by the sharpness of its incidental barbs. Nabokov was understandably put off by the pratfalls and slapsticks that Cervantes had made use of, while reducing knight-errantry to absurdity. To this more or less detached observer, such reductions seemed unnecessarily cruel, and his retraversal of those knightly adventures is darkly shadowed by the physical and mental cruelties that beset their picaresque itinerary. He was well aware of the progression from hard-boiled beginnings to a sentimentalized retrospect, which had been sporadically prefigured in the Second Part, and would be softened beyond recognition in *Man of La Mancha*. When other readers are tempted to share that mellowing outlook, Nabokov warns them off; repeatedly he voices his objections to "viewing the book as a humane and humorous one" (110); nay worse, and more defiantly expressed, "it is one of the most bitter and barbarous books ever penned" (52). Yet his heart goes out to the victim of its barbarities. At one of the Don's lowest

moments—"an ignoble show," publicly derided as he stands on a balcony in Barcelona, "a gaunt and melancholy figure"—Nabokov's description of him culminates with this comment: "lacking only a crown of thorns" (73). The hint of crucifixion is underlined at the climactic scene of his "Greatest Triumph"; his discourse to a company of twelve, on writing and fighting (and peacemaking), is interpreted as a Christlike parable at another Last Supper.

Animated by an untimely quest for adventure, Cervantes' plot is shaped—much too casually for Nabokov—by the roads that it rambles down, and by its discomfiting efforts to shed glory on the commonplaces that it encounters. The rhythm of the journey is marked by the stations along the way: the inns envisioned as castles by Don Quixote, which would have their latterday counterpart in the motels that punctuate the elopement of Lolita. Ultimately, when the Don arrives at a genuine castle, he makes it his inn; and his devotion to the invisible heroine, Dulcinea del Toboso, will waver toward the Duchess's lady-in-waiting, "little Altisidora," who is visualized by Nabokov as a nymphet. Since the settings have been pretty much taken for granted, he complains about Cervantes' ignorance of places. Can this be the veteran tax-collector, whose business took him regularly from one Spanish town to another? The question is resolved by noting that descriptions of nature in prose fiction, "the verbal rendering of landscapes," had to wait until the nineteenth century (32); at this prior stage the landscape is dead, though the dialogue can be vivid. But the commentator, despite his own rejection of realism and his predilection for fairylands forlorn, revivifies the roadside scenery with copious annotations on geography and topography, maps and floorplans, diagrams and chronologies. The naturalist expounds the various species of orchids, and shows an entomologist's concern for identifying a beetle, as he did with Kafka's "Transformation" (better known as "The Metamorphosis").

As a method of analysis, play by play and happening by happening, he adopts a code of reckoning peculiar to himself, but not unsuited to a would-be champion whose way of life is a round of tournaments. Nabokov was well versed in gamesmanship. An avid player and celebrator of chess, he invented and inserted chess problems into his volume of collected poems. As an admirer and translator of Lewis Carroll, recognizing the kinship between Don Quixote and the White Knight, he might have retraced the swerves of the former by the moves of the latter. Instead he chose to reckon by his other favorite sport. The novel is realigned to the rules of tennis; each incident is a match with the next opponent; and Nabokov is the umpire who charts the volleys and keeps the score. By his count there are forty games in all, with twenty of them ending in victories and twenty in defeats for the constant challenger, so that the final tally is a draw, forever undecided. "The fifth set will never be played. Death cancels the match" (110). This equipoise might not have been achieved without some counterbalancing on the part of the umpire. Most observers would regard the Don as—to say the least—rather more of a loser than a victor. To mention one strategic example: his demolition of the puppet-show must be accounted a

hollow victory, since he releases no prisoners from the Moors but has to pay full damages for his folly.

To rehearse his long and overflowing tale before a college class is to meet with endless occasions—and Nabokov can be counted on to take advantage of them—for *obiter dicta*, marginal sideswipes, or personal asides. When the Cervantists point out actual models for fictional personages, he deprecates such "human interest stuff" (63). This does not prevent him from pausing to announce that, although Cervantes' birthday would not quite coincide with Shakespeare's, given the disparity between the Julian and the Gregorian calendars, yet his own birthday may still lay claim to that distinction. Comic strips are held up to his youthful auditors as an updated parallel for the romances: the lovelorn Dorotea is compared to the sweetheart of Li'l Abner, Daisy Mae. Ever conscious of living and writing under the restless shadows of our twentieth century, Nabokov engages in topical allusion by way of cross-reference. One companion is likened to a Nazi renegade in the Captive's Story, which derives in part from that of Cervantes himself, imprisoned after the Battle of Lepanto and escaping from his Moorish captors. When his adventurers' route is clouded by a funeral procession, its white-shirted mourners (*encamisados*) grimly remind Nabokov of the Ku Klux Klan. When Cervantes alludes to the Spanish Inquisition, a footnote suggests an invidious comparison with the thought-police of contemporary Russia. The pseudo-academic tributes that preface the Second Part are just the sort that smooth the way for literary conformity "in the spirit of modern Fascist or Soviet dictatorships" (157).

What may have started out as a trial by single combat seems to have wound up as an exhibition match, with both parties helping to bring out each other's qualities. Nabokov was distanced much farther away than Cervantes from the world that knighthood once undertook to redress, and he recoiled not only from its obvious cruelties but also from the relative crudities of most earlier writers. The novel itself, as he knew and liked it best, could be perceived as a late development, permeated with memories and unified by depth of consciousness—attitudes that mainly have evolved since the eighteenth century. By such criteria Sterne may have been a precursor, but Fielding was left by the picaresque wayside along with *Gil Blas*, while *Les Liaisons dangereuses* had strengthened the sensibilities with the cutting edge of its assault upon them. *Dead Souls*, a landmark closer to Nabokov, faced backwards and forwards; as he was happy to observe in his little book on Gogol, its traditional rogueries are redeemed by its irrational insights and sudden focal shifts. "Another famous story where the grotesque and the lyrical are somewhat similarly interwoven," he evokes it in connection with the passage from *Don Quixote* that has moved him most (69). Sancho must be absent there; Dulcinea has never been present; the Don is sadly, "strangely alone" in his room at the castle, divesting himself of his tattered attire for the night. Suddenly his nostalgia is

allayed by the sound of music, and the fresh voice of Altisidora lends a touch of reality to his dreams.

Nabokov, so intensely self-conscious an artist, could not be expected to give up his misgivings over Cervantes' "scarecrow masterpiece" (27). But Nabokov the teacher, "the word-happy and footsore guide," would be half converted by the time he had reached the end of his reluctant pilgrimage (110). He would not relax his exacting esthetic standards, and these would never have permitted him to salute *Don Quixote* as one of the world's greatest novels. Yet somehow, under the stress of his public perusal behind a lectern at regular hours, he had come to hail its anti-hero as a great character, "greater today than he was in Cervantes' womb" (112). This capitulation may well have been due to a latent strain of responding quixotry in Nabokov's own nature; and that is precisely why the appeal was so wide, why there have been so many like-minded readers to empathize with it. In the last words of Nabokov's concluding lecture, his wordplay to the last: "the parody has become a paragon." The foolish knight has ambled out of the book and taken his place in our lives. As for Sancho Panza, here he remains behind in habitual posture, a whipping-boy for artistic shortcomings and intellectual clichés. Don Quixote, as Nabokov has felt obliged to teach us, "is a farrago of prefabricated events, secondhand intrigues, mediocre pieces of verse, trite interpolations, impossible disguises, and incredible coincidences" (111). But these are transcended by something that he freely calls "the intuition of genius." That accolade is used with more and more frequency. Cervantes too must have been an artist, after all.

Harry Levin

NOTES

1. Field, 1986, p. 239; Boyd, 1991, p. 213.
2. Boyd, 1991, p. 173.
3. Ustinov, p. 347.
4. Boyd, 1991, p. 272.
5. Donoghue, 1982.

LECTURES ON LITERATURE

Between 1941 and 1948, Vladimir Nabokov taught courses in Russian and European literature at Wellesley College, and from 1948 to 1958 was a professor of Russian Literature at Cornell University. One of his courses at Cornell was devoted to "selected English, Russian, French and German novels and short stories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." All works were

read in English translation, and the catalogue note added that "special attention will be paid to individual genius and questions of structure" (*LL* vii). Among the non-Russian novels included in the course were *Madame Bovary*, *Mansfield Park*, *Bleak House*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Swann's Way*, "The Metamorphosis," and *Ulysses*. The volume entitled *Lectures on Literature* is composed of a reconstruction of both the handwritten and typewritten notes made for these lectures by Nabokov the university professor, who intended eventually to turn them into a book; but he never managed to put them into a more polished and accessible form. Nonetheless, the work undertaken by the editor Fredson Bowers, with the help of Véra Nabokov, has resulted in a book that communicates the considerable charm of Nabokov's puckish classroom personality as well as provides invaluable glimpses into his views on important novelists and the art of the novel.

Nabokov of course drew on his own experience as a novelist in communicating what he felt was most important about all the works he discussed—not their content as such or as it might be expressed in one or another generalization about the book, but that content as it was developed concretely in and through the form and structure, the manipulations used by the author to obtain his effects. In an introductory lecture entitled "Good Readers and Good Writers," he warned his young American listeners not to come to books with preconceived notions (such as that *Madame Bovary*, for example, is a "denunciation of the bourgeoisie") but rather to look on each book as the creation of an entirely new world "having no obvious connection with the worlds we already know" (1). What is important is to immerse oneself in this new world and to understand its indigenous features; only after this is done should one "examine the links with other worlds, other brands of knowledge" (1). There are, Nabokov says, three kinds of novelists—storytellers, teachers, and enchanters; a major writer combines all three, but "it is the enchanter in him that predominates, and makes him a major writer" (5). It is the "enchanter" who ultimately creates a new fictional universe, and Nabokov's chief aim was to introduce his students into the architecture of these universes.

Just as he warns against approaching a novel with ready-made ideas of what it contains, so he warns against what he calls "emotional reading." A particular work causes readers to daydream about one particular experience in their own life; or readers identify with one or another character so completely that they lose themselves in this vicarious substitute for their own personality. This is not to say that imagination should not be used in reading; but "the reader must know when and where to curb his imagination" (4) by focusing on the specific world created by the author in all its details. Nabokov himself, probably because it amused him to do so but also as a pedagogic technique, was in the habit of drawing detailed maps on the blackboard (a number are reproduced in the book) of all the localities in which the action took place; in the case of *Bleak House*, he produced an entire map of England to follow the movement of the characters. This certainly helped to counter the tendency to

"emotional" reading; and in general he stressed the importance of such matters as "the rooms, the clothes, the manners of an author's people" (4) rather than their feelings or their ideas and values stated in abstract terms. Such a stress on the objective and the impersonal may seem rather limiting, but is in fact exaggerated to counter the bad reading habits he knew he would encounter. In discussing the texts, he does not hesitate to offer his own estimations and moral judgements; but these always emerge from an extremely concrete and detailed description of whatever is taking place on the level of language and of narrative movement and arrangement.

For Nabokov, who was not only a novelist but a lepidopterist engaged in making very precise observations about butterflies, the ideal reader would be someone capable of using an "*impersonal* [i.e., scientific] imagination" to attain the experience of "artistic delight" (and he stressed the importance of such a feeling with great emphasis) (4; italics added). But this delight should arise primarily from an appreciation of the artistry of the author; what the reader ought to "keenly enjoy—passionately enjoy with tears and shivers—[is] the inner weave of a given masterpiece" (4). This appeal to the sensuous and physical thrill imparted by artistic perception recurs several times (elsewhere he calls it "the telltale tingle between the shoulder blades"; 64), and one suspects here the influence of A.E. Housman, who said much the same thing about poetry. That Nabokov was a reader of Housman is indicated by a casual citation of a line of his poetry in the lecture on Dickens (65–8).

To conclude with Nabokov's preliminary observations on reading, one should note his insistence that "a good reader, a major reader, an active and creative reader, is a rereader" (3). Contrary to theorists like Stanley Fish, J. Hillis Miller, and Wolfgang Iser, who have argued that the temporality of a novel's perusal is crucial to its proper understanding, Nabokov sees such temporality more as an obstacle than an aid. Unlike a painting, which can be apprehended as a whole at a glance, a book is read in time and thus "one must have time to acquaint ourselves with it." This requires re-reading, and it is only "at a second, or third, or fourth re-reading," that "we do, in a sense, behave towards a book as we do towards a painting" (3). Nabokov thus sees the form of novels as primarily spatial, or synchronic rather than diachronic, and his belief that "aesthetic delight" is communicated by "the inner weave of masterpieces" expresses the same idea in a more figurative form.

Nabokov's course began with Jane Austen, whom he included on the advice of Edmund Wilson and apparently against his own initial inclinations. He wrote Wilson that "he could never see anything in *Pride and Prejudice*" and admitted to being "prejudiced, in fact, against all women writers"; but he finally yielded to Wilson's prodding and his suggestion that "you [Nabokov] ought to read *Mansfield Park*" (xxi). Nabokov did, and six months later thanked Wilson for putting him on to the text. He also enjoyed reading some of the works alluded to by Jane Austen (assigning them to the students as well) and was particularly amused by August von Kotzebue's *Lover's Vows* (1798),

a play quite important for the novel's plot, which he read "in Mrs. Inchbald's inimitable translation (a scream)" (xxii).

By the time he came around to lecturing on *Mansfield Park*, Nabokov's opinion about Jane Austen had considerably changed, and he does his best to overcome what he senses would be the resistance of his students to her world, which may appear "old-fashioned, stilted, unreal" (10). But he reminds them that "in a book, the reality of a person, or object, or a circumstance depends exclusively on the world of that particular work," and that we can only appreciate *Mansfield Park* if "we adopt its conventions, its rules, its enchanting make-believe." The book is "not a violently vivid masterpiece" like *Madame Bovary* or *Anna Karenin* (Nabokov always refused to include the usual "a" ending), but it is "the work of a lady and the game of a child." Nonetheless, from the workbasket of the lady comes "exquisite needlework art," and there "is a streak of marvellous genius in the child" (10).

One of the conventions that Nabokov points out immediately is the status of Austen's heroine, Fanny Price, who is a ward of the aristocratic family to whom she is related (and he notes that her mother's maiden name is Ward). Nabokov explains that such a heroine, popular in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel, was useful for a variety of narratological purposes. Her alien status evokes pathos, she can enter into a love affair with the son of the family, and she can be used as a surrogate for the author as "detached observer and participant in the daily life of the family. . . ." Dickens, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy all used the same convention, and Nabokov remarks that the prototype of these "quiet maidens is, of course, Cinderella. Dependent, helpless, friendless, neglected, forgotten—and then marrying the hero" (10).

Most of the lecture is given over, as will invariably be the case, to a close and careful survey of what goes on in the text, but these are never plot summaries, and are filled with insight into thematic relationships and interconnections as well as craft and technique. Defining the "four methods of characterization" that Jane Austen uses (direct ironic description, directly quoted speech, reported speech, imitative speech of one character by another), Nabokov provides examples of each. And though he had insisted that we cannot "learn anything about the past" from novels (1), he admiringly goes into the details of the education that young girls received in that period, and carefully explains what it meant to possess an ecclesiastical "living" (a parish, with an income from taxes) in the England of the time. The question of coming into a "living" is important for the action of the plot.

Nabokov also pays a good deal of attention to what is now called "intertextuality," the interweaving by Austen of other texts into her own. He appreciatively cites a poem of Cowper that Fanny refers to and quotes Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* to clarify one of Fanny's allusions. He reminds his students that "in Fanny's time the reading and knowledge of poetry was much more natural, more usual, more widespread than today" (24). And he delivers a broadside against "the vulgarities of the radio, video, or the incredible, trite

women's magazines" that have replaced "Fanny's immersion in poetry" (24). Nabokov also spots what he calls "reminiscence," that is, not a direct quotation but "an unconscious imitation on the author's part of some earlier author" (26).

There are a number of admiring comments on the skill with which Jane Austen organizes the structure of her action, and the manner in which "characterization . . . often grades into structure," so that the personal qualities of a character involve a type of behavior necessary for proper arrangement of the action. Lady Bertram's indolence keeps her in the country and thus allows Fanny to remain there as well "without complicating the situation by journeys to London" (16). When Fanny leaves Mansfield Park to stay with her slovenly family in Portsmouth, whose depiction reminds Nabokov of Dickens, much of what occurs is conveyed by letters; and Nabokov disparagingly remarks on this lapse into "the easy epistolary form. This is a sure sign of a certain weariness on the part of the author when he takes recourse in such an easy form" (49). Nabokov does not clarify his dislike of the epistolary novel, but suggests only that it leads to "too much . . . [happening] behind the scenes and that the letter-writing business is a shortcut of no very great artistic merit" (52).

Nabokov comments more favorably on what he calls Austen's use of "stream-of-consciousness or interior monologue to be used so wonderfully a hundred and fifty years later by James Joyce" (50). In fact, Austen's interior monologues are hardly stream-of-consciousness, a term now used for a more radical disruption of syntactical patterns than anything to be found in her work. Nabokov also singles out various other narrative and stylistic devices used by Austen and taken over by Dickens, not because of a direct influence of the first on the second but because both derived from the comedy of manners. These include the point already made about the use of a "Cinderella type" for what Nabokov now calls "the sifting agent," that is, the focus of consciousness "through whom and by whom the other characters are seen." To this he now adds the use, for "dislikable, or less likable characters," of "some little trick of demeanor, or manner, or attitude, and bringing it up every time the character appears" (56). E. M. Forster had made the same point in general, many years earlier, about what he had called "flat" characters in the novel.[1]

Nabokov concludes with some observations on Austen's style, whose imagery he finds "subdued," and he speaks of her quite traditionally as painting "graceful word pictures with her delicate brush on a little bit of ivory . . ." (56). He notes the probable influence of Samuel Johnson on her use of parenthetical expressions and on "the oblique rendering of the construction and intonation of a speech in descriptive form. . . ." With a term taken both from chess and Russian criticism ("the knight's move," the title of a book by Viktor Shklovsky), he describes "a sudden swerve to one or the other side of the board of Fanny's chequered emotions" (57). He also refers, in what is not one of his happiest coinages, to the "special dimple" of her style, which means the insertion of "a bit of delicate irony between the components of a plain informative statement" (58).

Finally, there is an admiring comment about the "epigrammatic intonation" of her language, "a certain terse rhythm in the witty expression of a slightly paradoxical thought." Nabokov clearly savors this quality of Austen's style and speaks of her tone of voice as "terse and tender, dry and yet musical, pithy but limpid and light." But this style is not her invention alone, and he suggests that "it really comes from French literature," where it is found throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Austen "handles it to perfection," and Nabokov then concludes by remarking that style is not something external to a writer. It is far from being only a "tool" involving "a choice of works," it is, rather, the very essence of the writer's personality (59).

Nabokov has done his best for Jane Austen, and there is little doubt that he became a qualified admirer of her talent; but in beginning his lectures on Dickens, he leaves no doubt that his esteem was hardly spontaneous. "Personally," he confesses, "I dislike porcelain and the minor arts, but I have often forced myself to see some bit of precious translucent china through the eyes of an expert and have discovered a vicarious bliss in the process." This is manifestly what he did with Jane Austen, but he still finds her fiction to be "a charming rearrangement of old-fashioned values" (63) that required an effort to sympathize with; in a footnote not included in the main lecture-text, he remarks: "No doubt can exist that there is in Jane Austen a slight streak of the philistine" (12). For Nabokov, nothing of the sort exists in Dickens, for whom he has the greatest admiration and whose talent he celebrates in rapturous terms.

Nabokov's first order of business is to sweep away the usual sociological or political approaches to *Bleak House*, which of course contains a ferocious attack on various abuses and injustices of the English legal system. The book is therefore a "satire," but Nabokov insists that a satire of no aesthetic value cannot attain its object; and if it is "a satire permeated by artistic genius" (which is the case with *Bleak House*), then "its object is of little importance and vanishes with its times while the dazzling satire remains, for all time, as a work of art" (64). A bit later, summarizing various aspects of the book, Nabokov writes: "The sociological side, brilliantly stressed by Edmund Wilson in his collection of essays, *The Wound and the Bow*, is neither interesting nor important" (68). What *is* important is Dickens, the great enchanter, whose imagery and mastery of language Nabokov cannot praise too highly, and whose wordplay seems to inspire some of his own penchant for verbal puns. Telling his listeners not to pay too much attention to the book as "an indictment of the aristocracy," represented by the Dedlock family, he remarks that "as artistic achievements the Dedlocks, I am sorry to say, are as dead as doornails or doorlocks (the Dedlocks are dead)" (65).

Nabokov breaks down the huge cast of characters into two groups, the evil and the good. The world of the Chancery, where the lawsuit of Jarndyce versus Jarndyce has been going on interminably, is "a kind of Hell" (68), with a whole host of devils as its emissaries. The good characters are those who escape this

world, or those who, though tempted and erring, are finally redeemed because they are essentially good. "Lady Dedlock is redeemed by suffering, and Dostoevsky is wildly gesticulating in the background" (68). Nabokov cuts his way through the profusion of the book by distinguishing three main themes: 1) the Chancery suit, "emblemized by London's foul fog," and all the characters entangled in its web; 2) "the theme of the miserable children and their relationships with those they help and with their parents, most of whom are frauds and freaks," and 3) "the mystery theme," involving Esther Summerson, who narrates a good part of the book and turns out to be the illegitimate daughter of Lady Dedlock (69).

Nabokov dwells at length on the opening passage, with its superbly eloquent depiction of the fog, rain, and mud of a London day in November, and points out how Dickens verbally slides from the external scene to the courtroom. "Sitting in the midst of the mist and the mud and the muddle, the Lord Chancellor is addressed by Mr. Tangle as Mlud," which becomes "Mud if we reduce the lawyer's slight lisp." Other examples are given of such wordplay, in which "inanimate words not only live but perform tricks transcending their immediate sense" (72). Nabokov then discusses other Chancery-theme characters such as the crazed Miss Flite, whose room is filled with caged birds that she intends to set free when the Chancery suit is settled, but whole generations of them have already died. Ever on the lookout for thematic linkages, Nabokov notes that when Esther left for school in her teens, "her only companion [was] a bird in a cage" (74).

Another character in this group on whom Nabokov expatiates is Krook, the junk dealer who collects and sells anything and everything and whose shop, with all its detritus, is linked verbally as well as materially with the "mad muddle and poisonous visions of the Chancery inheritance that will never come" (77). The gnarled, wizened and gin-sodden Krook makes his appearance, to quote Dickens, with "breath issuing in visible smoke from his mouth, as if he were on fire within" (77)—and indeed he was! Krook, Nabokov remarks, "seems to carry with him wherever he goes a kind of portable Hell," and he likes this last phrase—"portable Hell"—so much that he reminds the class: "this is Mr. Nabokov, not Mr. Dickens" (78).

In a famous scene that Nabokov surely read aloud with great delectation, Krook disintegrates because of "spontaneous combustion"—"the gin and the sin catching fire," Nabokov explains, "and the man burning to the ground" (81). Nabokov savors the poetic appropriateness of such a death for Krook, and it "matters not a jot whether or not a man burning down that way from the saturated gin inside him is a scientific possibility" (80). Of more importance, Nabokov insists, is the contrast between the two styles in the death-scene, the "rapid, colloquial style" of the two characters who horrifiedly discover the disintegration and the eloquent "apostrophic style" of Dickens himself as the scene concludes. Where does this second style come from, Nabokov asks, and locates the source in Thomas Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution* (1837).

A few samples are quoted from Carlyle's "magnificent work," which Nabokov assures the class "it is fun to dip into" (81).

Turning to the child theme in *Bleak House*, Nabokov begins with a discussion of the "false childishness" of Harold Skimpole (83), a character in whom Dickens satirizes the selfishness and moral irresponsibility of a purely "aesthetic" approach to life. Nabokov does not mention that Skimpole is usually taken as a harsh caricature of the English Romantic man of letters Leigh Hunt; what interests him is Skimpole's claim that, since he is really a child, he is released from any duties and obligations to anyone, even to his own children. The good John Jarndyce is taken in, but the course of the book reveals Skimpole's "essential cruelty and coarseness and the utter dishonesty of the man. As a parody of the child, he serves, moreover, the purpose of bringing out in beautiful relief the real children in the book, who are little helpers, who assume the responsibilities of grown-up people, children who are pathetic imitations of guardians and providers" (91).

Nabokov is obviously moved by Dickens's portrayal of *such* children, and rejects the usual "charge of sentimentality made against this strain that runs through *Bleak House*" (86). At this point, Nabokov throws out a general comparison between the literature of the past ("the world of Homer . . . or Cervantes") and the present, much to the advantage of the present. Neither Homer nor Cervantes, he argues, knew "the divine throb of pity," and he emphatically asserts that "modern man is on the whole a better man than Homer's man. . . . In the imaginary battle of *americus* versus *homericus*, the first wins humanity's prize." As for Cervantes, Don Quixote "is a madman . . . and there is always a belly laugh just around the corner of the least pity." Not so for Dickens, where "it is the real thing, keen subtle, specialized compassion . . . with the very accent of profound pity in the words uttered . . ." (87). As for the crime-mystery theme involving Lady Dedlock, "structurally it is the most important of the themes of mystery and misery, Chancery and chance." But Nabokov goes through its intricacies conscientiously without any comment of particular interest; he merely observes that "the plot of the mystery theme does not quite live up to the poetry of the book" (97).

He then shifts to some general observations about narrative technique, citing Flaubert's dictum that an author should be like God, "nowhere and everywhere, invisible and omnipresent." Actually, Flaubert "did not attain that ideal in *Madame Bovary*" (the work Nabokov will be taking up next), and Dickens had no such ambition at all; he is one of those authors who are not "supreme deities, diffuse and aloof, but puttering, amiable, sympathetic demigods, who descend into their books under various disguises" and in the shape of a whole variety of characters (97). This leads Nabokov into a classification of three types of such authorial representatives. One is the first-person narrator, either the author himself or a character, or an invented author like the Arabic chronicler in *Don Quixote*, or a mixture of first and third-person narrators. There is also the type of character already mentioned, "the sifting

agent," a third-person character like Fanny Price who acts as the consciousness through which the action is seen and felt. A third type of character is christened a "perry" by Nabokov, a term derived from "periscope" and invented by him in a not very inspired moment. The term designates what he calls the "lowest kind of authorial minion," a character invented for the author's convenience and who can be used and moved around at will to meet the needs of the text—"a peregrinating perry" (98). (One wonders if the term was not invented to allow for this pleasing alliterative combination.) Henry James called this type of character a "*ficelle*" (a piece of string), necessary to tie up and hold the book together; and James's term seems an apter one, since the notion of "periscope" suggests a function too close to that of a "sifting agent."

After disposing of his three main thematic complexes, Nabokov then moves on to discuss eight structural features of *Bleak House*. One is the usage of Esther as first-person narrator in half of the book, which Nabokov considers "a little mistake for which he [Dickens] will have to pay dearly." The problem is that Esther's "bubbling baby talk" is much too limited, and that Dickens finds it necessary very soon, and quite inconsistently, to endow her with much of his own "incantatory eloquence" (100–101). Nabokov thinks that it was "a main mistake . . . to let Esther tell part of the story. I would not have let the girl near!" (102). Another problem arises from Esther's looks, which are ruined when she catches smallpox and is left with a scarred and pitted face. But since it is necessary that she marry the young doctor Allan Woodcourt at the end, Dickens is very vague about what she looked like, and she seems, as time goes on, to have regained some of her attractiveness. Nabokov wonders whether the scars have not vanished after seven years and notes Dickens's efforts to cope with this problem.

Nabokov singles out Dickens's use of Allan Woodcourt as a "perry," who turns up whenever he is necessary, and excuses the plethora of coincidences arising from his use because it leads to some first-rate scenes (such as the death of the desolate young streetsweeper Jo). He also points out an interesting anomaly: Esther as narrator recounts incidents involving Woodcourt at which she was not present. Only Woodcourt could have told her about them, and such knowledge thus foreshadows their future marriage long before it takes place. There are many more shrewd notations of this kind about *Bleak House*, which are too numerous to mention in detail, and the lectures conclude with several pages of comments on some traits of Dickens's style.

Nabokov celebrates the exactitude and precision of Dickens's gift for vivid evocation, and calls the first description of the Dedlock estate, Chesney Wold, "a passage of sheer genius" (114). Of a description of the sea, he points out some details of color that Dickens "noted for the very first time with the innocent and sensuous eye of the true artist . . . and immediately put into words" (116). What literature consists of is precisely such observations, which may seem like trifles but are in fact the heart of the matter; it is not "general

ideas" but "particular revelations" that are important, "not . . . schools of thought but . . . individuals of genius" (116).

One such individual was certainly Flaubert, and Nabokov begins his lectures on *Madame Bovary* with the remark that "of all the fairy tales in this series, Flaubert's novel . . . is the most romantic. Stylistically, it is prose doing what poetry is supposed to do" (125). The novel is concerned with adultery, and Nabokov, then at work on what became *Lolita*, fills in the historical background of Flaubert's indictment and trial for obscenity. "As if the work of an artist could ever be obscene," he says in passing. Flaubert won his case a hundred years ago, he goes on, but "in our days, in our times . . ." (125). The sentence trails off in this fashion, and one surmises that he may have been thinking of the possible destiny awaiting his own novel.

Just as the satirical aspects of *Bleak House* had been swept aside, so he warns the class not to regard Emma's life as a product of objective social conditions. "Flaubert's novel deals with the delicate calculus of human fate, not with the arithmetic of social conditioning" (126). Emma and most of the other characters are described as "bourgeois," but by this word Flaubert is not describing a politico-economic class; what he means is a "philistine, preoccupied with the material side of life and believing only in conventional values" (126). In this sense, all of "Soviet literature, Soviet art, Soviet music, Soviet aspirations are fundamentally and smugly bourgeois. It is the lace curtain behind the iron one" (127). The essence of the bourgeois can be found in Flaubert's smugly epical pharmacist Monsieur Homais, and both Flaubert and Marx were bourgeois each in his own way—the well-to-do Flaubert in an economic sense, Marx in a spiritual one.

Nabokov then begins to explore the various thematic lines that he distinguishes in the novel, and which are very far from being the usual ones. The first is "the layers or layer-cake theme" (128), which he illustrates by the absurdly ridiculous shako that Charles Bovary wears on his first day in school. This is carefully described as composed of various layers that Flaubert methodically goes through, and Nabokov cites other examples (such as the wedding cake, or the description of the Bovary house at Tostes, or Charles's directions for Emma's funeral) in which the same layering arrangement of details is used. These passages echo each other for Nabokov and provide a certain structural framework, but whether such a purely external feature will take on the same significance for other readers, who Nabokov assumes will recall all instances of this kind "with the utmost lucidity" (132), may well be doubted.

Emma Bovary is a "romantic" person, which means someone "mentally or emotionally living in the unreal"; and such people can be profound or shallow, "depending on the quality of his or her mind." Nabokov finds Emma to be shallow, despite her "charm, beauty, and refinement" (132), and he exhibits no sympathy whatever for her plight. "Her exotic daydreams do not prevent her from being a small-town bourgeois at heart," and her way of rising above the

conventional was to commit adultery—which is "a most conventional way to rise above the conventional" (133). On the other hand, though Charles Bovary is a philistine, "he is also a pathetic human being," and Nabokov considers his love for Emma to be "a real feeling, deep and true, in absolute contrast to the brutal or frivolous emotions paradoxically experienced by . . . her smug and vulgar lovers." Nabokov thus paradoxically finds that the "dullest and most inept person in the book" is the only one "who is redeemed by a divine something"—that is, "the all-powerful, forgiving, and unswerving love that he bears Emma, alive or dead" (133).

Nabokov illustrates how Flaubert indirectly communicates Emma's sensuous charms through carefully chosen details seen through the enraptured eyes of her future husband (correcting various mistranslations as he goes along), and then compares the wedding procession with that of Emma's funeral to bring out certain similarities. With reference to the "daydream theme," Emma's romantic reveries nourished by her reading of Romantic literature, he links this up with his earlier advice on how to read properly. Emma "is a bad reader. She reads books emotionally, in a shallow juvenile manner, putting herself in this or that character's place" (136–37). But Flaubert's listing of "all the romantic clichés dear to Emma's heart" is done with such skill that "they produce an effect of harmony and art" (138). The same occurs in the case of Homais's vulgarities; even though "the subject may be cruel and repulsive. . . . Its expression is artistically modulated and balanced" (138).

In addition to the daydream theme, there is also that of deceit, which impels Emma to hoodwink Charles, so as to move from Tostes to Yonville, even before committing adultery. Nabokov sees Emma as being "deceitful by nature," and as not really differing in essence from Homais. But he thinks that the resemblance is "veiled by her grace, her cunning, her beauty, her meandering intelligence, her power of idealization, her moments of tenderness and understanding, and by the fact that her brief bird life ends in human tragedy" (142). All the same, there are qualities in this list that can hardly be attributed to Homais, against whom Nabokov releases the full force of his invective. Homais is called a "traitor, a cad, a toad . . . a coward . . . a pompous ass, a smug humbug, a gorgeous philistine. . . ." Noting that Homais gets his coveted government decoration in 1856, Nabokov insists that "this kind of thing is not peculiar to any given government régime," and that "philistinism is more in evidence during revolutions and in police states than under more traditional régimes" (143).

Nabokov had a deep-rooted dislike of literary labels of all kinds, and he disposes of those usually attached to Flaubert very briefly. "Can we call *Madame Bovary* realistic or naturalistic" he asks (146)? His answer is to list some of the implausibilities that abound in the book (such as the unbelievable blindness of Charles Bovary to his wife's infidelities) so as to indicate how little "realism" the book contains. Besides, as he goes on to explain, terms like

realism and naturalism "are only comparative notions. What a given generation feels as naturalism in a writer seems to an older generation an exaggeration of drab detail, and to a younger generation not enough drab detail" (146–47). The Russian formalist critic Boris Eikhenbaum, in a well-known book on *The Young Tolstoy*, had made the same point many years before, and the relative nature of "realism" had also been pointed out in an essay of Roman Jakobson's.[2] One assumes that Nabokov may have been familiar with these Russian works and was outlining their results for his American students.

Interweaving his observations with citations from Flaubert's letters, Nabokov illustrates what he calls Flaubert's "counterpoint method" of linking "two or more conversations or trains of thought" in the same scene (147). The best-known instance of this is the country-fair ("comices agricoles") episode, during which the hardened landowner and man-of-the-world Rodolphe seduces Emma while speeches are being made and prizes handed out for prize crops and animals; the contrast between "the stale journalese" of the speeches and "the stale romantese" of the courtship exchanges leads to some brilliantly ironic effects (147). Nabokov points out other examples of the same cross-cutting technique, which exercised an enormous influence, and he also speaks of Flaubert's skill in motivating changes of scene in the course of a chapter rather than waiting for the end of chapters, as in *Bleak House.* Flaubert's grouping of characters in certain scenes so as to suggest, and anticipate, their thematic relationships also comes in for approving notice.

By way of conclusions, Nabokov returns to his opening remarks that Flaubert's novel is prose doing the work of poetry, and mentions that Gogol called *Dead Souls* "a prose poem" (171). The same is true for *Madame Bovary* and this book is even "composed better, with a closer, finer texture." Nabokov then lists and illustrates some of the features of Flaubert's style, such as the habit of rounding off a paragraph with "*and* and a semi-colon"; this introduces "a culminating image, or a vivid detail, descriptive, poetic, melancholy, or amusing" (171). Another feature of the style is "what may be called the unfolding method, the successive development of visual details, one thing after another" (172); this would seem to be related to the "layering" arrangement noted earlier, but Nabokov fails to link them up specifically. He does point out, however, Flaubert's use of the French imperfect tense, referring to Proust's famous article on the subject, to render "something that has been happening in an habitual way" and to display, as Proust said, Flaubert's "mastery of time, of flowing time" (173).

Nabokov's general view of Flaubert is conveyed by what he asks his class to "ponder most carefully" that "a master of Flaubert's artistic power manages to transform what he has conceived as a sordid world inhabited by frauds and philistines" into "one of the most perfect pieces of poetical fiction known" (147). It is through "the inner force of style," and by "all such devices as the counterpoint of transition from one theme to another, of foreshadowing and echoes," that such a feat has been accomplished—one which has affected the

entire future of the novel. "Without Flaubert there would have been no Marcel Proust in France, no James Joyce in Ireland. Chekhov in Russia would not have been quite Chekhov" (147).

The same certainly cannot be claimed for Robert Louis Stevenson, whose *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* Nabokov insisted on including in his course over the objections of Edmund Wilson. Stevenson, in Wilson's opinion, was "second-rate. I don' t know why you admire him so much," he wrote Nabokov (xxi). Nabokov hardly explains this admiration in his careful account of the book, but perhaps one of his quotations may provide a clue. Dr. Jekyll speaks of his chemical transformation from one personality to another as a challenge to the power of the material over the human spirit, a denial of the omnipotence of the body. "I began to perceive more deeply than it has ever been stated, the trembling immateriality, the mist-like transience, of this seemingly so solid body in which we are all attired. . . . Certain agents I found to have the power to shake and pluck back that fleshly vestment, even as a wind might toss back the curtains of a pavilion . . ." (181). Commentators have noted the strong influence of Gnostic philosophy on Nabokov,[3] which views the body as trapped in a lower world of materiality from which it longs to escape, and this metaphysical strain in Stevenson's book, usually neglected in favor of its moral theme, could well have had a special appeal for Nabokov.

"Three important points," according to Nabokov, are usually overlooked in "the popular notions of this seldom read book" (182). One is that Dr. Jekyll is "a mixture of good and bad" and thus not entirely good at all; the second is that Jekyll does not simply become Hyde, but Hyde represents "a concentrate of pure evil" that is mixed in Jekyll with the good; the third is that when Hyde dominates the personality, "a Jekyll residue" remains that is "horrified at his worser half's iniquity" (182–83). Nabokov sees these relations as "typified by Jekyll's house" (184), and as usual describes the structure very carefully, with a diagram to match. The imposing entrance is on a fashionable street, but the back part is dingy and disreputable.

Stevenson's artistic problem, as Nabokov sees it, was to convey his "fantastic story" through the medium of two "matter-of-fact persons," Dr. Jekyll's lawyer Utterson and his friend, the young businessman Enfield, "in an atmosphere familiar to the readers of Dickens, in the setting of London's bleak fog" (188). But if he made them *too* stolid and matter of fact, "they will not be able to express even the vague discomfort Hyde causes them" (193). What happens is that "Hyde's presence brings out the hidden artist in Enfield and the hidden artist in Utterson"; they react in a way that "can only be explained by the abrupt intrusion of the author with his own set of artistic values and his own diction and intonation" (193). Whether Nabokov thinks this a defect remains unclear.

There is also another problem that Nabokov points to and specifically labels as a weakness; this is the vagueness and unspecificity of the evil pleasures in which Dr. Jekyll is supposed to have indulged. Victorian restrictions of

course held Stevenson in check; but even if he had wished to make the doctor a libertine like Tolstoy's Stiva Oblonsky in *Anna Karenin*, "the pleasures of a gay blade" would have clashed with "the medieval rising as a black scarecrow against a livid sky in the guise of Hyde." Women hardly appear in the book at all, and Nabokov raises the possibility that this "may suggest . . . that Jekyll's secret adventures were homosexual practices so common in London behind the Victorian veil" (194). Utterson suspects that Dr. Jekyll is being blackmailed by Hyde, who is named as Jekyll's inheritor in his will, and this raises a spectre that could well be homosexuality. As for Hyde, all we learn of his "pleasures is that they are sadistic—he enjoys the infliction of pain" (196). Stevenson hated cruelty above all else and thus depicted Hyde as an "inhuman brute" who lusts to kill, not as someone indulging in "beastly lusts" (196).

Even before reaching Proust, Nabokov had remarked that his vast opus was "the greatest novel of the first half of our century" (139), and he turns to *Swann's Way* (which he translates literally as: *The Way to Swann's Place*) with eager enthusiasm. In fact, however, he ranges over the entire work in his comments, and he calls "the whole . . . a treasure hunt where the treasure is time and the hiding place the past" (207). Noting that Proust "had studied the philosophy of Henri Bergson," he attributes to this influence "Proust's fundamental ideas regarding the flow of time . . . the constant evolution of personality in terms of duration, the unsuspected riches of our subliminal minds which we can retrieve only by an act of memory, of individual association; also the subordination of mere reason to the genius of inner inspiration and the consideration of art as the only reality in the world" (208).

Nabokov immediately discards the notion that the book is an autobiography and stresses that "the narrator is not Proust the person, and the characters never existed except in the author's mind." To speak of Proust's life would "only cloud the issue" (208), especially since there is a resemblance between the narrator and author, and they live in the same environment; in other words, the question of distinguishing between them is too difficult to tackle. Nabokov also refuses to enter into the social-historical context of Proust's world and lays down the highly contestable dictum that "the inhabitants of that world are of no social or historical importance whatever" (208). This is of course a wild exaggeration, but perhaps Nabokov felt it necessary so as to focus on the chief thematic nexus. Otherwise, it might seem as if the book were nothing but a series of parties narrated at enormous length and that "the narrator's main concern was to explore the ramifications and alliances which link together various houses of the nobility" (210). On the contrary, the book is really about the process of its own creation, though the work we read is not the ideal novel that the narrator sets out to write at the conclusion of the last volume. "Proust's work is only a copy of that ideal novel—but what a copy!" (211).

Nabokov justly sees the center of the book as defined by Proust's famous sentence: "What we call reality is a certain relationship between sensations and

memories which surround us at the same time, the only true relationship, which the writer must recapture so that he may forever link together in his phrase its two distinct elements" (211). He then goes on to speak of the two walks taken by the narrator in his youth, one towards Swann's place and the other towards the Guermantes estate, and explains that "all its [the novel's] fifteen volumes in the French edition is an investigation of the people related in one way or another to the two walks of his young life." The depiction of the narrator's boyhood agony on failing to receive his mother's goodnight kiss in *Swann's Way* foreshadows "Swann's distress and love, just as the child's love for Gilberte and then the main love affair with a girl called Albertine are amplifications of the affair that Swann has with Odette" (211). Both walks are united at the end in the figure of Swann's granddaughter, who is herself a Guermantes.

Proust's style comes in for extensive discussion, and Nabokov stresses its wealth of metaphorical imagery and Proust's "tendency to fill in and stretch out a sentence to its utmost breadth and length, to crowd into the stocking of the sentence a miraculous number of clauses, parenthetic phrases, subordinate clauses, sub-subordinate clauses. Indeed, in verbal generosity he is a veritable Santa . . ." (212–14). Comparing Proust and Gogol, he says that Proust's imagery "differs from Gogol's rambling comparisons by its logic and poetry. Gogol's comparison is always grotesque, a parody of Homer, and his metaphors are nightmares, whereas Proust's are dreams" (214). As he continues his survey, Nabokov also singles out the relativity of perception in Proust, "the various ways in which a person is seen by various eyes." The example cited is how Swann is seen by Marcel's family, who can "think of him only as the son of their old friend, the stockbroker" (217).

This observation leads Nabokov into a comparison "between the Proustian and Joycean methods of approaching their characters." What Joyce does is to take "a complete and absolute character . . . then breaks it up into fragments and scatters these fragments over the space-time of his book." Proust, on the other hand, "contends that a character, a personality, is never known as an absolute but always as a comparative one. He does not chop it up but shows it as it exists through the notions about it of other characters" (217). Each ultimately depends on the reader to put the characters together into a unity. Another comparison is also made between Proust, Gogol and Tolstoy in relation to a scene in which Proust dwells on the effects of moonlight in Marcel's room. Gogol "would also have used rich imagery" in describing a moonlit garden, "but his rambling comparisons would have turned the way of grotesque exaggerations and some beautiful bit of irrational nonsense" (220). Nabokov thinks, however, that there is a resemblance between the vision of moonlight in Proust and the scene in *War and Peace* where Prince Andrey and Natasha both look out at a moonlight-filled night from separate windows, and he hears her singing in the room above.

Nabokov then comes to the episode involving the *madeleine*, the first of those moments when the narrator suddenly gains access to his buried memories, and which is called here: "The Miracle of the Linden Blossom Tea." The narrator does not understand the meaning of this recovery of the past through the sudden and haphazard shock provoked by some insignificant sensation, and it is only in the last volume, when he "received in rapid succession three shocks, three revelations (what present-day critics would call an *epiphany*)—the combined sensations of the present and recollections of the past"—that he understands their "artistic importance" (222). Up until that time, though he knew that these experiences filled him with happiness, he did not know what they meant—that in them he had found the secret to the recovery of "lost time," the secret that would lead him to his creation.

Nabokov sees the figure of Marcel's invalid Aunt Léonie in Combray as "a kind of parody, a grotesque shadow of Marcel himself in his capacity of sick author spinning his web and catching up into that web the life buzzing around him" (228). Turning to Marcel's grandmother, "the most noble and pathetic character in the book" (216), whose gifts to her grandson were always works of art of one kind or another, Nabokov observes that Proust's imagery was often taken from the same realm. He explains this in two ways: one is that "for Proust art was the essential reality of life," and thus he tends to view everything in its terms; another is that "in describing young men he disguised his keen appreciation of male beauty under the masks of recognizable paintings," while "in describing young females he disguised . . . his sexual indifference to women and his inability to describe their charm" (228).

Proust's depiction of what are now called same-sex relationships is also exemplified by the scene involving the daughter of Vinteuil, the musician and composer; Marcel spies her lesbian friend desecrating the picture of the dead Vinteuil before the two women make love. Nabokov thinks this scene "a little lame" without explaining why, though he pinpoints the use of eavesdropping as "enhancing its awkwardness. . . . Its purpose, however, is to start the long series of homosexual revelations and revaluations of characters that occupy so many pages in the later volumes and produce such changes in the aspects of the various characters" (232). According to Nabokov, "the first homosexuals in modern literature" (231) were described by Tolstoy in *Anna Karenin* (part 2, ch. 19), where he depicts two officers of Vronsky's regiment breakfasting in the mess room and leaves no doubt about their relationship. Just as he mentions Proust's own homosexuality, so Nabokov provides the information that Proust was half-Jewish on his mother's side; and despite his denial that Proust's characters possessed any "social or historical importance," he makes an exception for Marcel's Jewish friend Bloch and for Swann, also of Jewish origin. Proust was "greatly concerned with the anti-Semitic trends in the bourgeois and noble circles of his day," and in fact, "the Dreyfus affair [is] the main political event discussed in the later volumes" (230).

Describing Marcel's bewilderment at not being able to find a philosophic theme for some great literary work and wondering at the impression made on him by "some material object devoid of any intellectual value, and suggesting no abstract truth" (237, quotation from Proust), Nabokov brings out the implications of this passage in a manner revelatory of his own conception of art and of the strong Proustian influence he had assimilated. "Contrasted here are the literature of the senses, true art, and the literature of ideas, which does not produce true art unless it stems from the senses. To this profound connection Marcel is blind. He wrongly thinks he had to write about things of intellectual value when in reality it was that system of sensations he was experiencing that without his knowledge was slowly making an authentic writer of him" (237). Nabokov's own insistence on the importance of "sensations" throughout his analyses and his distrust of generalizations and abstractions are obviously related to this Proustian process of Marcel's self-discovery as an artist.

Nabokov loved to bring his specialized knowledge to bear on a literary work, and he regaled the class with information about the orchid, *Cattleya labiata*, so essential in the love affair between Swann and Odette. He drew a picture of it and explained that its name came from William Cattley, "a solemn British botanist," and that its color—"rose-purple mauve, a pinkish lilac, a violet flush"—"is linked in European literature with certain sophistications of the artistic temperament." In the United States, alas, it "regularly adorns the bosoms of matrons at club festivities." For Nabokov, the "mauve color" of the orchid, "the violet tint . . . runs through the whole book, is the very color of time" (241). By this he probably means that pinkish colors show up in the hawthorns of the Combray chapters, in the pink dress worn by Odette years earlier, and then a pinkish light, "the color of heliotrope" (241) is associated with Marcel's recollections of Gilberte. The concluding pages of these Proust lectures which quote extensively from *The Past Recaptured*, were inserted by the editor to fill out Nabokov's notes.

One can hardly imagine two artistic worlds more different than those of Proust and Kafka, but Nabokov moves blithely from one to the other without drawing any comparisons. He opens his lectures on Kafka, however, by stressing the importance of being able to respond to a work of art intuitively, without waiting even for the best analysis to furnish some sort of explanation of why a "poor fellow is turned into a beetle." What is necessary is "to have in you some cell, some gene, some germ that will vibrate in answer to sensations that you can neither define, nor dismiss." Such reflections lead Nabokov to what he calls "the closest we can get to a definition of art"—which turns out to be "*beauty plus pity*" (italics in text). This definition is then given a metaphysical twist by the further statement: "Where there is beauty there is pity for the simple reason that beauty must die: beauty always dies, the manner dies with the matter, the world dies with the individual" (251). Pity is thus primarily a mourning over human temporality, though Nabokov, as we have

seen, also sympathizes intensely with all those characters who suffer unduly in the world of temporality as well.

Since Kafka's story involves a "fantastic" event, Nabokov discusses the general question of the relation between reality and fantasy. Imagining the perceptions of several kinds of people (a vacationer in the country, a botanist, a local farmer), he vividly illustrates how different the response of each would be to the same environment; but if we mix them all together and pick a fragment of the mixture at any moment of time, we get what is called "*objective reality*" (italics in text). The term means "an average sample of a mixture of a million individual realities" (253), and this is how Nabokov distinguishes it from worlds which are "specific fantasies."

Nabokov then compares "The Metamorphosis" with Gogol's "The Overcoat" (which for some reason he calls "The Carrick" [?]), and with *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as examples of fantasies. The first two belong together because each contains a central figure "endowed with a certain amount of human pathos among grotesque heartless characters" (253–54). Even more, "their central human characters belong to the same private fantastic world as the inhuman characters around them, but the central one tries to get out of that world, to cast off the mask, to transcend the cloak or the carapace" (254). This striving would also seem to be true of Dr. Jekyll; but Nabokov disparagingly notes that he is surrounded by a second-hand Dickensian world, which has not been sufficiently transformed to become part of the imaginative fantasy. Stevenson's novel thus possesses only "conventional pathos" (255), though Nabokov insists that it is very far from being a failure.

Providing some elementary information about Kafka, Nabokov declares him to be "the greatest German writer of our time," in comparison to whom Rilke and Thomas Mann "are dwarfs and plaster saints" (255). Well, this merely reveals the limitations of Nabokov's own taste, as well as his delight in startling his listeners by such iconoclastic and peremptory judgments. He also dismisses the opinion of Max Brod "that the category of sainthood, not that of literature" (255) should be applied to Kafka, and ridicules the Freudian commentators who focus on Kafka's relation to his father; these interpret "the bug" as characterizing "his own sense of worthlessness before his father" (256). Kafka himself, he points out, was "extremely critical of Freudian ideas," and as for himself, Nabokov declares that "I am interested in bugs, not in humbugs, and I reject this nonsense." What he wishes to do is to "concentrate . . . upon the artistic moment." Nabokov believed that the greatest literary influence on Kafka was Flaubert; and whether this is true or not, he perceptively notes that Kafka's style has "a kind of ironic precision, with no intrusions of the author's private sentiments," that was "exactly Flaubert's method" (256).

Nabokov is very methodical in his discussion of "The Metamorphosis," breaking it up into three parts, the first of which is divided into seven scenes, the second nine, and the third ten. What occurs in each scene is carefully outlined, and the economic situation of the family at the beginning is described

quite thoroughly. Nabokov the scientist is quite concerned with pinning down exactly what kind of insect Gregor Samsa became, and goes into the problem of how many legs he woke up with; they are called "numerous," but since if there had been more than six he would not technically be an insect, Nabokov settles for that number. Drawing a picture of Gregor's insect form, which is that of a beetle, Nabokov carefully distinguishes him from a cockroach, and remarks that beetles actually have little wings which Gregor never seemed to have discovered. "This is a very nice observation on my part," he tells the class endearingly, "to be treasured all your lives. Some Gregors, some Joes and Janes, do not know that they have wings" (259). Nor is Gregor's "transformation" as incredible as it may appear at first sight; a sense of estrangement is a normal part of human reality, and "constantly characterizes the artist, the genius, the discoverer" (260). This is exactly how Nabokov sees Gregor: "The Samsa family around the fantastic insect is nothing else than mediocrity surrounding genius" (260).

Nabokov points out that Gregor's "human impressions still mingle with his new insect instincts" (260), and interprets his awakening as a beetle as the attempt to escape from his family. These "are his parasites, exploiting him, eating him out from the inside. This is his beetle itch in human terms"; but Gregor finds that even as a beetle he is just as "vulnerable as his sick flesh and spirit has been" (261). Nabokov meticulously analyzes the evolution of Gregor's family in response to the situation, remarking on their gradual disintegration but emphasizing their heartlessness and cruelty by contrast with the continual sweetness of Gregor's own disposition. Pointing out how quickly the family adapt themselves to the situation, instead of reacting to the monstrous change with "shrieks and tears, in wild compassion," he refers to a newspaper account of a recent murder committed by a boy and girl found making love by the girl's mother, whom they promptly dispatched, then they gave several beer parties before being caught. All this to show "that in so-called real life we find sometimes a great resemblance to the situations in Kafka's fantastic story" (266–67).

Nabokov returns again and again to the leitmotif of Gregor's contrast with his callous family, his moral superiority to them even in his beetle form. "Kafka's art consists in accumulating on the one hand, Gregor's insect features, all the sad detail of his insect disguise, and on the other hand, in keeping vivid and limpid before the reader's eyes Gregor's sweet and subtle human nature" (270). There is a controversial remark about music when Nabokov comes to the scene in which Gregor's sister scrapes away at her violin, and he crawls out to listen. Although placing a great composer on the same level as a great painter or writer, Nabokov argues that music appeals to its listeners in "a more primitive, more animal form in the scale of arts than literature or painting" (277). This explains why Gregor, who had never exhibited much interest in music, responds to its appeal as a beetle. To assuage music lovers, however, Nabokov adds that the "soothing, lulling, dulling" influence of music is

particularly noticeable in "the canned music or plugged-in music of today" (278).

The lectures conclude with a summing-up that singles out the importance of the number "three" in the story, which repeatedly turns up in one guise or another. Nabokov repeats his warning against reading any deep meaning into this fact "for once you detach a symbol from the artistic core of the book, you lose all sense of enjoyment" (283). He excoriates the search for "such inept symbols in the psychoanalytic and mythological approach to Kafka's work, in the fashionable mixture of sex and myth that is so appealing to mediocre minds." For him, the symbolism of three is both aesthetic and logical: "the trinity, the triplet, and triad and triptych are obvious forms" for the expression of the stages of human life and the movement of the mind. Nothing else is necessary to understand Kafka's masterpiece, in which "the limpidity of his style stresses the dark richness of his fantasy" (283).

Joyce's *Ulysses* was the final novel taken up in Nabokov's course, and it was a work that he had long admired (with some reservations). The two writers had met briefly at a dinner party in Paris in 1939, and Joyce presented Nabokov with a copy of *Haveth Childers Everywhere*, a fragment of *Finnegans Wake*. Nabokov calls the complete work "one of the greatest failures in literature" (349), but he did not cease to admire *Ulysses* and submits it to a very thorough analysis. In doing so, he exhibited a detailed knowledge of Dublin topography whose source he did not try to conceal. Like Joyce himself, he relied "on data from Thom's *Dublin Directory*, whither professors of literature . . . secretly wing their way in order to astound their students" (285). Joyce also used a copy of the Dublin newspaper *The Evening Telegraph* for Thursday, June 16, 1904, the day whose events are depicted, or rather refracted, through the prism of Joyce's literary imagination. It was the day, apparently, on which Joyce had met his wife Nora Barnacle. "So much for human interest," Nabokov remarks wryly (286).

He then goes on to furnish some information about the three major characters—Leopold Bloom, his wife Molly Bloom, and Stephen Dedalus. Most attention is given to Stephen, whom Nabokov calls "an abstract young man, a dogmatist even when drunk, a freethinker imprisoned in his own self, a brilliant pronouncer of aphoristic sayings" (286). But he is "a bitter and a brittle young fellow," who is "a projection of the author's mind rather than a warm new being created by an artist's imagination." Nabokov thinks it "neither here nor there" that critics tend to identify Stephen with Joyce himself. Also, noting that all three characters have "artistic sides" (Molly Bloom is a concert singer), Nabokov thinks that this aspect of Stephen "is almost too good to be true—one never meets anybody in 'real life' approaching such a perfect artistic control over his casual and everyday speeches as Stephen is supposed to have" (286). It is rather odd to see Nabokov, in view of his own novels, applying such a criterion of verisimilitude to Joyce.

Nabokov is generally sympathetic to Leopold Bloom, whom he sees as the type of the exile, the Wandering Jew, and whose qualities of kindliness and humanity he stresses appreciatively. But he is bothered by the fact that, while Joyce pretended to portray him as an "ordinary citizen," it is clear (at least to Nabokov) "that in the sexual department Bloom is, if not on the verge of insanity, at least a good clinical example of extreme sexual preoccupation and perversity with all kinds of curious complications" (287). What Nabokov means is that "in Bloom's mind and in Joyce's book the theme of sex is continually mixed and intertwined with that of the latrine." Nabokov explains that he has no objection to "frankness in novels," indeed he favors it, but he is upset by Joyce's inconsistency. For it is simply not true "that the mind of an ordinary citizen continuously dwells on physiological things. I object to the continuously, not the disgusting" (287).

Nabokov also believes that *Ulysses* has been "slightly overrated" by critics who are "more interested in ideas and generalities and human aspects than in the work of art itself" (287). This seems a highly unsatisfactory way of dismissing those critics who think that Joyce's parallelism with Homer is important for the book; to be concerned with such a parallel is scarcely to abandon the work of art for "ideas and generalities." But Nabokov thinks it important to "warn against seeing in Leopold Bloom's humdrum wanderings and minor adventures . . . a close parody of the *Odyssey*" (288). To focus on the "very general Homeric echo" in the book would turn it into a "protracted and sustained allegory based on a well-worn myth," and nothing could be more tedious. Nabokov points out that Joyce himself eliminated the pseudo-Homeric chapter, or, rather, episode heads of the magazine publication, and assumes that this was done "when he saw what scholarly and pseudo-scholarly bores were up to." He singles out Stuart Gilbert for special condemnation and, exhibiting his command of American local color, compares such allegorization with turning "a thousand and one nights into a convention of Shriners" (288).

What the book is really about is Bloom's never-ending despair over his dead son, Bloom's love for Molly, who he knows is on the point of having an affair with her manager Blazes Boylan, and the Fate that brings him together with Stephen Dedalus, whom he would much prefer as a lover for Molly to Boylan. Pointing out that each episode is written in a different predominating style, Nabokov thinks, unlike most critics, that "there is no special reason why this should be" (288), though he has some kind words for the effect created. He compares it to bending over, looking between one's outspread legs, and suddenly seeing the world in a new perspective; "this trick of changing the vista, of changing the prism and the viewpoint," is similar to Joyce's constant shift of stylistic tonality, which "conveys a more varied knowledge, fresh vivid glimpses from this or that side" (289).

Joyce writes in three main styles, which Nabokov labels as "the original Joyce: straightforward, lucid and logical"; stream-of-consciousness, which is now defined as "incomplete, rapid, broken wording . . . the stepping stones of

consciousness"; and parodies of all kinds of other styles, both literary and "nonnovelistic" (289). While admiring Joyce's inexhaustible verbal ingenuity ("puns, transposition of words, verbal echoes, monstrous twinning of verbs, or the imitation of sounds"), Nabokov thinks that these, along with "the overweight of local allusions and foreign expressions," may create "a needless obscurity" of detail (290). These styles are employed to depict the characters as they come and go "during their peregrinations through a Dublin day" in what Nabokov calls "a slow dance of fate." The whole of *Ulysses*, he says, "is a deliberate pattern of recurrent themes and synchronization of trivial events" (289).

Most of the lectures are given over to a careful *précis* of what goes on in each episode of the book, numbered by part and chapter, and preceded by information about the time and place of the action and the characters involved. It is obviously impossible to summarize Nabokov's summary of the book, but Nabokov makes evaluative and explanatory comments both on the characters themselves or the style of the section, and a few may be singled out as typical. One such is a reference to the scene culminating in Buck Mulligan wiping his razor blade on Stephen's snot-green handkerchief. "This links up," Nabokov says, "the snotgreen sea with Stephen's filthy handkerchief and the green bile in the bowl; and the bowl of the bile and the shaving bowl and the bowl of the sea, bitter tears and salty mucous, all fuse for a second in one image. This is Joyce at his best" (297).

Nabokov notes with approval Stephen's rebuke to the anti-Semitism of Mr. Deasy, the headmaster of the school in which he teaches, and he returns to the issue later to stress that "vicious or conventional prejudice animates most of the people whom Bloom meets in the course of his dangerous day" (316). Stephen Dedalus himself offends Bloom when he sings a song "which is a parody of the sixteenth-century ballad about young Hugh of Lincoln, believed in early times to have been crucified by the Jews in the twelfth century" (316). Nabokov particularly likes the scene in which Bloom brings Molly her breakfast in bed; he calls this "one of the greatest passages in all literature" (306). He is also fascinated by an unnamed character who is referred to eleven times and is only identified as wearing a brown mackintosh. Nabokov conducts an elaborate inquiry in order to establish, at least to his own satisfaction, that the Man in the Mackintosh is really Joyce himself.

The famous journalism chapter (Part 2, Epis. 4), whose sections "bear humorous titles in a parody of newspaper headlines," is not to Nabokov's taste; he declares it "poorly balanced" (320). But he is lavish in praise of the Gerty McDowell chapter (Part 2, Epis. 10), where he savors the parody of the feminine magazine style and notes how Joyce somehow managed to reconvert "bits of dead prose and rotting poetry" into genuinely moving expressiveness that is "tender and beautiful" (346). He is also touched by the contrast between Gerty's clichéd preoccupation with beautiful and elegant clothing and the disclosure that she is hopelessly lame. By this means "Joyce manages to build

up something real—pathos, pity, compassion—out of the dead formulas which he parodies" (347).

Nabokov himself, so preoccupied with mysterious patterns determining the fate of characters in his novels, is also impressed with the various types of synchronization that Joyce uses to indicate the simultaneity of what is occurring. He carefully follows the course of a printed scrap of paper, containing a sermon about the coming of Elijah, that Bloom crumples up and throws into the Liffey river. It appears and reappears in various places, just like characters "who walk through several chapters as one of the many synchronizing agents in the book" (323). One episode (Part 2, Epis. 7), which contains fifty characters, is analyzed in detail to bring out how they "cross and recross each other's trails in a most intricate counterpoint." He rightly considers this technique "a monstrous development of Flaubert's counterpoint themes, as in the agricultural show scene in *Madame Bovary*" (330).

As usual, Nabokov dismisses any attempt to interpret the great Nighttown scene, where the characters undergo all kinds of hallucinatory metamorphoses, in psychoanalytic terms. For Nabokov, it is "an hallucination on the author's part, an amusing distortion of his various themes." The style is described as "a nightmare comedy," and Nabokov detects in it an "acknowledgement to the visions in a piece by Flaubert, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, written some fifty years earlier" (350). Nabokov focuses particularly here on the relations between Stephen and Bloom and contrasts them very eloquently. "Bloom is the kindly, diffident, humane materialist; Stephen the ascetic, hard, brilliant, egotist who in rejecting God has also rejected mankind" (355). Joyce makes Stephen physically disgusting, but Nabokov is obviously attracted to "his lofty, soaring mind . . . and fantastically rich and subtle frame of reference" as well as the proud integrity and moral courage of "his independence carried to the point of obstinacy" (355).

The final pages are devoted to the memorable, forty-page soliloquy of Molly Bloom just before falling asleep; and this leads Nabokov to some further comments on the stream-of-consciousness technique. He believes that readers are "unduly impressed" by this type of narration, which is not more "realistic" or "scientific" than more familiar narrative means. He repeats the point that we think in images as well as words, and this stylistic convention thus unrealistically eliminates description; it also results in a "blurring of the time element," since reflections often slow and stop and do not really proceed in an uninterrupted flow. Nabokov warns against considering "the stream of consciousness as rendered by Joyce a natural event;" it is just a literary convention like any other (363). It of course has had a tremendous influence, and "in the typographical broth many a poet has been generated: the typesetter of the great James Joyce is the godfather of tiny Mr. Cummings." Nabokov also adds that "if punctuation marks be inserted" into the text, "Molly's musings would not really become less amusing or less musical" (363). This last sentence indicates Nabokov's aesthetic enjoyment of Molly's recollections, whatever his reserva-

tions about the more extravagant claims made for its narrative mode, and he ends by quoting substantial extracts of its stylistically epoch-making pages. These culminate in Molly remembering how she had embraced Bloom during their courtship and led him on to propose, responding with a Yes. Nabokov echoes her last word in his final sentence: "Yes: Bloom next morning will get his breakfast in bed" (370).

Lectures on Literature also includes a lecture entitled "The Art of Literature and Commonsense," which is not part of the Cornell series but written earlier, in 1940–41, and given as part of a creative writing course at Stanford University. It deals, very allusively and charmingly, with the question of the artist's relation to reality and what his obligations are to respond to this reality in terms of his art. Written in a light tone of irreverent mockery, it is still one of Nabokov's most important statements of his ideological beliefs, and sets up a clear-cut antithesis between "commonsense"—which might be defined as the dominance of the massmind—and the art of literature. Individuality of all kinds is crushed by "commonsense," and "the meek prophet, the enchanter in his cave, the indignant artist, the nonconforming little schoolboy all share in the same sacred danger" (372). The artist should thus have no truck with "commonsense," and "I never could admit that a writer's job was to improve the morals of his country, and point out lofty ideals from the tremendous heights of a soapbox, and administer first aid by dashing off second-rate books" (376).

This does not mean that the artist has no concern with morality, but only that this concern should take into account that a "commonsensical majority in a righteous rage" is perfectly capable of putting to death anyone because of "the color of one's creed, neckties, eyes, thoughts, manners, speech" (372). Nabokov himself cherished "an irrational belief in the goodness of man (to which the farcical and fraudulent characters called Facts are so solemnly opposed)" (373); and it is precisely because nothing in the world of "commonsense" can justify such a belief (quite the opposite!) that it is so valuable, precious and indestructible. The same is true for a belief in personal immortality: "That human life is but a first installment of the serial soul and that one's individual secret is not lost in the process of earthly dissolution, becomes something more than an optimistic conjecture, and even more than a matter of religious faith, when we remember that only commonsense rules immortality out" (377).

There is much more in this essay of first importance for understanding Nabokov's convictions and worldview, but this is not the topic of the present article. He finishes, however, with an evocation of literary inspiration that may be cited as a finale. What he says is very similar to what T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound also wrote about poetic inspiration as the grasping, "in an instant of time," of a whole complex of impressions and sensations that fuse together in a hitherto unperceived unity. "It is," Nabokov writes, "the past and the present *and* the future (your book) that come together in a sudden flash; then the entire circle of time is perceived, which is another way of saying that time ceases to

exist" (378). This is the initial revelation of inspiration, "and the pages are still blank, but there is a miraculous feeling of the words all being there, written in invisible ink and clamoring to become visible" (379). Moreover, as the writer settles down to put these words on paper, most important of all is that he forget "the monster of grim commonsense that is lumbering up the steps to whine that the book is not for the general public, that the book will never never—And right then, just before it blurts out the word, *s, e, double-l,* false commonsense must be shot dead" (380).[4]

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NOTES

1. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel.*
2. Eikhenbaum, *Molodoi Tolstoy*; Jakobson, "O khudozhestvennom realizme" ("On Artistic Realism"). Jakobson's article was first published in Czech translation in 1921, and in Ukrainian in 1927; its first Russian publication was in 1962.
3. See Davydov, 1982; Alexandrov, 1991.
4. Some additional appraisals and analyses of *Lectures on Literature* can be found in Boyd, 1991; Robert Adams, 1980; Alter, 1980; Balbert; Fremont-Smith; Hardwick; Pritchett, 1981; Reynolds; Ross, 1981–82; Simon.

LECTURES ON RUSSIAN LITERATURE

Even before leaving Europe for America, Nabokov had conceived the idea of supporting himself and his family by lecturing in English on Russian literature. He apparently produced during 1940–41 a monumental 2,000 pages of lecture notes, enough for 100 lectures figured at twenty pages per hour.[1] The first lectures actually to be delivered—except for a single one presented in February at Wells College—were given at Wellesley College in March 1941: "The Technique of the Russian Novel," "The Short Stories of Gorky and Chekhov," "The Proletarian Novel," "The Soviet Drama," "The Soviet Short Story." Alas, the full texts of these early performances do not seem to have survived; Nabokov's fulminations on the "proletarian novel" would doubtless have made lively reading. At any rate, the lectures were so successful that Nabokov was invited back to Wellesley for the entire academic year 1941–42. In the interim he taught two summer courses at Stanford, one of them on Russian literature.

As "writer-in-residence" at Wellesley in 1941–42, Nabokov offered no regular courses, but rather a series of public lectures, most of which dealt with Russian literature: Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol treated as "West European writers" in the fall; Turgenev, Tolstoy, Tiutchev, and Chekhov in the spring.[2] An interesting article, "The Lermontov Mirage," presumably derived

from this series, was published the same year, but its text has not been included in *Lectures on Russian Literature*. Giving only extracurricular Russian language courses, Nabokov did not lecture on Russian literature again at Wellesley until 1946. A year-long course given that year labelled "Russian Literature in Translation" covered poetry in the first semester—Pushkin, Lermontov, Tiutchev, and Fet; and prose in the second—Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov. All these lectures were apparently culled from the 2,000 pages prepared in 1940–41, with considerable new editorial and research assistance from his wife.[3]

In 1948 Nabokov accepted a regular faculty position at Cornell University, which he was to hold for a little more than ten years. He also taught as a visitor at Harvard in the spring of 1952. His courses on Russian literature in both institutions varied a good deal, some requiring knowledge of Russian, others not. The *Lectures on Russian Literature* as published by Fredson Bowers in 1981 apparently derive mostly from materials prepared for survey courses on Russian literature with readings in English, but Russian authors were also sometimes included in the famous general course at Cornell on Masterpieces of European Fiction. It is clear, however, from quotations adduced in the Boyd biography that a good many fascinating additional lecture notes are still to be found in the Nabokov archive. Bowers's Introduction regrettably does not make clear the extent of this material nor the basis of his selections from it, and one is further distressed to read the comment of Brian Boyd, who had full access to the archive, that "The lectures as edited for publication contain many puzzling omissions, misreadings, spurious improvements, and even sheer editorial invention."[4] It is to be hoped that eventually a more responsible edition will be published (with an index!). Surely everything Nabokov wrote about literature is of interest.

In his later years Nabokov himself intermittently intended to work these lectures up for publication. His resolve, however, was erratic, at times collapsing into exclamations of disgust: "My university lectures (Tolstoy, Kafka, Flaubert, Cervantes, etc. etc.) are chaotic and sloppy and must *never* be published. None of them!"[5] This blanket prohibition was later rescinded,[6] but other distractions, commitments, and creative impulses were too many. Nabokov's earthly time ran out before he got around to redoing his lectures. For the time being we are thus limited to what Bowers has extracted from the *Nachlass*.

The book leads off with "Russian Writers, Censors, and Readers," the text of a lecture read on April 10, 1958, as the *pièce de résistance* of a Festival of the Arts held at Cornell. Witty and elegant, this lecture articulates convictions about authorial freedom that Nabokov had held at least since his work on the Chernyshevsky chapter in *The Gift*. Russian literature throughout its history had been burdened by heavy external pressures. In the nineteenth century these had come from two directions. From the right, a hidebound and paranoid government had imposed a negative censorship, the aim of which

was to prevent literature from arousing or propagating any independent critical thought, especially about Russian political and social realities. This censorship was at its worst under Nicholas I (1825–55) but remained an oppressive presence until the revolution of 1905.

From the left, from the 1840s on, vociferous radical critics, whose words were taken as gospel by progressive-minded citizens, insisted that literature, if it was to be anything more than a toy for the idle rich, should harness itself to the cause of "the people," exposing existing evils and pointing the way to a better social order. The best writers successfully maneuvered to circumvent the official censors while more or less ignoring the radical critics, who nevertheless had a profound impact on readers' ideas about the function of literature. After 1905 official censorship virtually vanished, and the insistent demands of the radicals, which had sounded so loud fifty years before, seemed far less imperative in the much more diverse and pluralistic culture of the modernist era. But in the Soviet period the two forces of oppression were for the first time combined into one. The power of the state was used to enforce not just a negative censorship of prohibition, as the tsarist one had done, but a positive one of prescription, incorporating a vulgarized version of the dogmas of the nineteenth-century left. Literature was now *obliged* to serve "the people," and at least in the official view "the people" and the Communist state were one.

In this lecture Nabokov thus eloquently articulates with regard to literature the liberal position his father had represented in Russian political life: opposition to tyranny and oppression from both left and right. In conclusion he brought down the house by reading, with appropriate comic gestures and intonations, two absurd passages he claimed to have extracted from Soviet novels of the love-on-the-assembly-line variety. Both passages are almost certainly of Nabokov's own manufacture, but they deftly parody heavy-footed Stalinist "romanticism."

By way of preface to Nabokov's comments on individual Russian authors, the following is a summary of the general principles that underlie them. Let us call them Nabokov's Laws.

1. *Only peaks count.* The only literature worthy of the name is great literature, those unpredictable products of genius that, accumulated through the centuries, comprise the literary component of the cultural heritage of mankind. It is a case of greatness or nothingness. These erratic sunbursts of genius are all that deserve notice; anything below that rank, anything second rate, meretricious, market or audience oriented, indeed anything less than world-class, for-the-ages masterpieces is hardly worth mention, except to be dismissed with contempt.

2. *"Ideas" don't matter.* What makes art great is never the ideas it embodies, especially not "general ideas," which for Nabokov is

a code term for the common currency of second-hand formulas and clichés with which most people articulate their understanding of life. Everyone traffics in "general ideas," but ideas are lifeless. "The admirable reader is not concerned with general ideas: he is interested in the particular vision" (*LRL* 11). Only great artists have the power to create imaginary worlds that give the illusion of life. This feat is accomplished by observation and representation of *detail.* The true artist understands "the supremacy of the detail over the general, of the part that is more alive than the whole" (*LL* 373). For the reader to seek to derive from art generalizations about life and the world is "academic." Books should be read "for the sake of their form, their visions, their art" (*LL* 382).

3. *Art is autonomous.* The work of art is a world unto itself, a creature of the artist's imagination; it is to be judged only by its own laws of internal consistency and appropriateness, not by whether it truthfully replicates the "real world" outside. There are laws of "harmony and economy" which the most irrational masterpiece must comply with; artistic truth is measured only by plausibility, whether a given detail fits into the pattern of the created world, "no matter how unlikely the person or thing may seem if transferred into what book reviewers, poor hacks, call 'real life'" (*LL* 10). The reader's job is to participate vicariously in this imaginary world, to relish its vividness, palpability, and intensity. However, to seek emotional gratification by "identifying oneself with the characters" is "infantile," just as to seek to learn from art how "to live" is "adolescent" (*LL* 381). Finally, writers have no obligation to try to improve their societies. Their responsibility is only to the integrity of their art.

4. *Great art looks beyond quotidian reality.* "Human life is but a first installment of the serial soul," and the "individual secret is not lost in the process of earthly dissolution" (*LL* 377). The "irrational, the illogical, the inexplicable" as embodied in art points the way to something beyond ordinary life. Consequently, art cannot be judged by the mundane standards of "reality." For reality itself is but a "mask" (*LRL* 60), and "such poets as Coleridge, Baudelaire and Lermontov have been particularly good at creating a fluid and iridescent medium wherein reality discloses the dream of which it consists."[7]

As will be apparent from Nabokov's discussions of individual writers, there are several contradictions or paradoxes in the application of these principles. Art creates autonomous, imaginary worlds which are not bound by the laws and limitations of the one we live in and is not to be judged by them; yet it usually draws on materials taken from this world, and Nabokov is fanatically insistent that these materials should be rendered and visualized with maximal precision. "Any ass can assimilate the main points of Tolstoy's attitude toward adultery but in order to enjoy Tolstoy's art the good reader must wish to visualize, for instance, the arrangement of a railway carriage on the Moscow-Petersburg night train as it was a hundred years ago. Here diagrams are most helpful" (*SO* 157). Moreover, the metaphysical can be reached only through the physical. "To be a good visionary you must be a good observer. The better you see the earth, the finer your perception of heaven will be."[8]

The *Lectures on Russian Literature* are in no sense a history of Russian literature during the period covered (Gogol through Gorky). Nabokov's view of the central importance of the individual creative impulse, the absolute uniqueness of the isolated genius, was so strong that it would seem hardly possible for him to recognize the possibility of a *history* of literature in the sense of a causal process whereby one writer, however great a genius, grows out of and depends on the literary ambience of his time, created by his (perhaps lesser) predecessors and contemporaries. (Nabokov did, however, have high praise for D.S. Mirsky's famous *History of Russian Literature* [*SL* 91].) Nabokov's commentaries on *Evgeny Onegin* do actually elucidate many instances where a major poet derived sustenance and style from lesser ones; Nabokov gleefully out-scholared the scholars by tracking down and reading (and also grading!) every second- and third-rate French eighteenth-century poet whose verse ever echoed in Pushkin's head. But in the *Lectures*, at any rate, he makes no attempt to trace connections among his major authors, let alone show their interaction with minor ones. Similarly, Nabokov also disapproved of any serious attempt to link an author's personal life, either its external events or its internal dynamics, with his works. For literary interpretation biographical facts are irrelevant, "neither here nor there."[9]

After "Russian Writers, Censors, and Readers" the *Lectures* proceed immediately to Gogol's *Dead Souls*. The text of the Gogol chapter is extracted verbatim from *Nikolai Gogol*, to which a full separate entry is devoted in this volume; it is therefore passed over here.

With the chapter on Turgenev we begin what were evidently Nabokov's unrevised lecture notes; the difference from the highly burnished, glittering chapter on Gogol is striking. Even though fully written out, as some reproduced handwritten pages attest, the style of the Turgenev text is much looser, flatter, flabbier. Though always perceptive and with occasional flashes of brilliance, it lacks the wit, the sparkle, the unmistakable Nabokov personality that informs every sentence of the Gogol book—demonstrating once again

how hard Nabokov had to work to achieve his effects. In the unrevised lectures we experience Nabokov, as it were, at a first rehearsal, still far from the easy elegance of the ultimate public performance. For one thing, in his academic career Nabokov faced the problem that every garden-variety professor knows all too well: limited preparation time. Obliged to give six literary lectures per week plus a seminar, Nabokov simply could not raise the level of these classroom performances to that of his published criticism. Moreover, what spare time he had was mainly devoted to his primary career as a creative writer, combined, mostly in the summers, with ardent lepidopterology.

Even though he hates "Tom-peeping over the fence of [their] lives" (138), Nabokov does provide capsule biographies of his Russian writers, often rather carelessly assembled, and some brief comments on works other than the one assigned.

Following his usual methodology, after a summary biography Nabokov leads us through *Fathers and Sons*, stopping to comment on points of interest along the way. He is very much the professional novelist observing how a colleague does his job. Nabokov admires Turgenev's painterly eye: he was "the first Russian writer to notice the effect of broken sunlight or the special combination of shade and light upon the appearance of people" (69). But Turgenev is essentially a describer, not a narrator: "As a story-teller, he is artificial and even lame" (70). Sensing the weakness in his storytelling art, Turgenev avoids extended narrative. One result is the curious structure of Turgenev's novels: an elaborate introduction, setting up and contrasting his characters; a "ponderous epilogue," relating "what is supposed to happen to his invented creatures beyond the horizon of his novel"; and a very brief, truncated center, the main plot! Nabokov also finds a bit tiresome Turgenev's habit of repeatedly stopping the action while he gives an encapsulated biography of a character, and he likewise gives Turgenev bad marks for resorting to such hackneyed tricks as the Eavesdropping Device. Turgenev's style strikes Nabokov as "patchy." Certain passages are made of "honey and oil." The artist's favorites, they "have been pampered much more than the others" and stand out from the "general flow of good, clear, but undistinguished prose" (69–70). Nabokov also notes in *Fathers and Sons* some violations of plausibility. Pavel Kirsanov, for example, advertised as exquisitely well mannered, would hardly at the outset have been so hostile and rude to Bazarov as Turgenev represents him; Turgenev sacrifices plausibility in order to waste no time in facing off his antagonists. But Nabokov appreciates the subtlety with which Turgenev brings out the hidden sexual rivalry of these same two men over Fenichka—an ironic rivalry, in that both of them disapprove of their own impulses. Bazarov, in love with Odintsova and officially regarding sex as a purely physiological function, after kissing Fenichka mockingly congratulates himself "on his formal introduction into the ranks of the Lotharios." Pavel Kirsanov witnesses this kiss (a visual variant of the Eavesdropping Device) and challenges Bazarov to a duel; but he is himself guilty of lusting after his

brother's future wife, and in atonement he eventually has to banish himself, living out an aimless life abroad.

Nabokov takes pleasure in pointing out keenly observed details: the "grayish luster of black silk apparently poured" over Odintsova's waist; the "pinched-up face that looked like a small clenched fist" of her aunt. He has no patience, however, with Turgenev's "lame and coy" (78) allusion to the beginning of a sexual relationship between Nikolai Kirsanov and Fenichka. But most of all Nabokov faults Turgenev's narrative machinery. When the two amorous couples, Bazarov–Odintsova and Arkady–Katia, are paired off in an arbor, Nabokov exclaims, "We have sunk to the level of a comedy of manners. The overhearing device is with us, the pairing device is with us, the summing up device is with us" (91). Still, the novel seems redeemed in his eyes by the scene of Bazarov's death, "the greatest chapter in the novel" (92), and despite his scorn for epilogues in general, Nabokov seems touched by the pathetic picture, in the final, summing-up chapter, of the old Bazarov couple visiting their son's grave.

Nabokov's students were thus being effectively taught to sharpen their vision, to slow down their reading, to linger over the details, and to be aware of some of the mechanics of the writer's craft. True to Nabokov's abhorrence of "general ideas," they were told next to nothing about *Fathers and Sons* as a vehicle of thought. The conflict of art vs. science, with Turgenev subtly loading the dice on the side of art, is never explicitly identified: Bazarov's shocking ignorance of Pushkin is not mentioned, and the irony of his dying as a result of his own scientific activity is not pointed out. Other carefully engineered put-downs of Bazarov are also not foregrounded: the proud plebeian scoffer at romantic nonsense not only falls hopelessly in love but even fights a duel—just like the most stereotypical romantic aristocrat. Likewise, Nabokov has no interest in treating the novel as a document in Russian social history, nor is there any attempt to place the novel in its time, to recreate the literary atmosphere of 1862 into which it emerged. Instead, *Fathers and Sons* is perceived as a timeless work of art, judged according to aesthetic criteria apparently regarded as absolute.

We now move to Dostoevsky. Nabokov's vehement aversion to Dostoevsky is notorious, and some readers have even suspected him of assuming this extreme stance simply for shock effect. But from private documents it is clear that Nabokov's dislike of Dostoevsky was a genuine and deeply held "strong opinion." Rereading Dostoevsky in 1946 in preparation for his Wellesley course, Nabokov wrote Edmund Wilson that Dostoevsky was "a third-rate writer, and his fame is incomprehensible" (*NWL* 172). As professor, however, Nabokov was to some extent forced to take cognizance of the world's "incomprehensible" admiration for this third-rate writer. Though he was "too little of an academic professor to teach subjects that [he] dislike[d]" (98), even Nabokov could hardly present a survey course on the Russian novel without Dostoevsky. But that did not mean he had to praise him. The law that "only

peaks count" still applied, and "Dostoevsky is not a great writer, but a rather mediocre one—with flashes of excellent humor, but, alas, with wastelands of literary platitudes in between" (98).

Nabokov confesses his difficulty in approaching this unpleasant subject in the classroom: the desire to debunk is tempered by the knowledge that not all his students have had sufficient exposure to great literature to understand the standards he is applying to Dostoevsky. He then seems to begin the same procedure followed with Turgenev—a brief biography followed by a conducted tour through an assigned work. The biography, again not without errors, is duly offered, but the conducted tour never materializes. Though *Crime and Punishment* seems to have been the assigned text, along with *Notes from Underground,* that novel is treated no more fully than later, unassigned ones, *The Idiot, The Possessed,* and *The Brothers Karamazov,* all of which are charged with heinous literary crimes. Actually, Nabokov's fullest treatment is accorded to *Notes from Underground,* which he insists on calling "Memoirs from a Mousehole."

Before he gets down to cases, however, Nabokov outlines his anti-Dostoevsky indictment in general terms. First, Dostoevsky is a sentimentalist, like Richardson and Rousseau, guilty of "placing virtuous people in pathetic situations and then extracting from these situations the last ounce of pathos" (103). Second, Dostoevsky's novels lack the sensory, especially the visual intensity Nabokov always sought. "The weather does not exist in his world, so it does not much matter how people dress" (104). Third, most of Dostoevsky's characters, victims of epilepsy, senile dementia, hysteria, and psychopathy, are simply too far removed from the experience of ordinary people to be meaningful. "It is questionable whether one can really discuss the aspects of 'realism' or of 'human experience' when considering an author whose gallery of characters consists almost exclusively of neurotics and lunatics" (109). Moreover, these sick characters undergo no development. "The only thing that develops, vacillates, takes unexpected sharp turns . . . is the plot" (109). Dostoevsky does build suspense with consummate mastery, but this effect is lost after the first reading.

Nabokov has read *Crime and Punishment* four times, he tells us. At twelve it was "a wonderfully powerful and exciting book." By nineteen it had become "long-winded, terribly sentimental, and badly written." He read it again at twenty-eight, when discussing Dostoevsky "in one of my own books" (presumably *Despair*), and finally "when preparing to speak about him in American universities. And only quite recently did I realize what is so wrong about the book" (110). What is wrong is apparent from the scene where Raskolnikov and Sonia read together from the "eternal book" the story of the raising of Lazarus. By thus symbolically linking the Murderer and the Harlot as redeemable sinners, Dostoevsky implies some sort of spiritual community between them. This implication, however, is false. "The inhuman and idiotic crime of Raskolnikov cannot be even remotely compared to the plight of a girl who

impairs human dignity by selling her body. . . . It is a shoddy literary trick, not a masterpiece of pathos and piety" (110).

Nabokov actually explicates with reasonable accuracy, though always in a disparaging tone, the main "general ideas" confronted in *Crime and Punishment*: the superman versus the herd and redemption through public confession and suffering (though he underplays the religious basis of the redemption). But apart from his general lack of interest in the ideas embedded in novels, Nabokov considers these ideas vitiated by the choice of a tortured neurotic as their exponent.

In general, however, it is the application of Nabokov's Second Law ("ideas don't matter") that makes it impossible for him to admire or even to see what others have admired in Dostoevsky: a capacity scarcely equalled in world literature to incarnate ideas in fiction, dramatize them, charge them with human personality and human emotion. If the ideas in them are discounted, discredited, and denied, as is done by Nabokov, Dostoevsky's novels indeed become flat and lifeless, grab-bags of clichés and cheap effects. It is extraordinary, for example, that in his discussion of *Notes from Underground* Nabokov, who after his research for *The Gift* could legitimately claim to be the world's leading expert on Chernyshevsky, does not mention Chernyshevsky's name even once, though of course the *Notes* derive their intensity from Dostoevsky's passionate polemic in them with Chernyshevsky and the ideas he stood for (rationalism, scientism, progressivism).

Lack of interest in the "ideas" incorporated in literary works is after all a general, consistently applied rule of Nabokov's aesthetics. To turn up one's nose at literary characters, however, as Nabokov does at Dostoevsky's, on the grounds that they are too psychically diseased to be of interest to normal readers—this seems a very strange position to be taken by the author of such masterful studies of perversity as *Laughter in the Dark* and *Lolita*. Yet this is exactly the philistine stance Nabokov adopts in relation to the hero of *Notes* (and many other Dostoevsky characters). There can be no hint of any common humanity between Nabokov and the "mouseman," "a moral misfit, a moral dwarf" (117). Nabokov retells in some detail and apparently with some pleasure the scene of the "mouseman's" humiliation at the party given by his former schoolmates, but the whole story of his encounter with the prostitute Liza is waved aside with disdain ("Perhaps some of you may like it more than I do," 125).

Nabokov proceeds to knock off their pedestals all of Dostoevsky's other major novels. *The Idiot* is "crazy hash interspersed with dialogues. . . . The religious aspects are nauseating in their tastelessness" (128). In *The Possessed* "the farcical intrigue which is mixed with tragedy is obviously a foreign importation" (129). *The Brothers Karamazov* is little more than a strung-out detective story, "a riotous whodunit—in slow motion" (133). All the novels would better have been written as plays. They employ "all the tricks of the theatre," but "considered as novels, his works fall to pieces" (130). However,

as Simon Karlinsky has discerningly pointed out, the occasional leaks of admiration in the Dostoevsky chapter suggest more affinity between the two writers than Nabokov was willing to acknowledge—or perhaps admit to himself.[10]

Nabokov is no doubt entitled, like anyone else, to his personal responses to Dostoevsky's novels, though one may question whether it is ethical for a teacher to try so insistently to load his prejudices onto his students. But it does seem irresponsible for Nabokov to keep his students in ignorance of the great achievements of Russian Dostoevsky criticism of the preceding decades. The work of such people as Vasily Rozanov, Vasily Komarovich, Dmitry Chizhevsky, Arkady Dolinin, Lev Shestov, Viacheslav Ivanov, Alfred Bem, Viktor Vinogradov, Mikhail Bakhtin, Leonid Grossman, Nikolai Berdiaev, and Konstantin Mochul'sky by 1948 had utterly changed and greatly enriched the world's understanding of Dostoevsky. Yet Nabokov refers to none of them. Of course, he need not have mentioned all or any of these explicitly by name; but some notion of the basic ideas and interpretations they advanced should surely have been presented, even in an elementary course. The only critics Nabokov does mention are two who wrote in English, D.S. Mirsky (as support for the view that the authenticity of Dostoevsky's Christianity is in question) and, of all people, Petr Kropotkin, the "anarchist prince," whose Lowell Lectures on Russian literature had seemed quaintly old-fashioned in their prejudices even when delivered in 1901.[11] (Kropotkin shared Nabokov's aversion to Dostoevsky's characters as belonging more to the realm of psychiatry than to literature.) In general, the Dostoevsky chapter does not do Nabokov credit, either as literary criticism or as instruction.

It is therefore a relief to turn from Dostoevsky to Tolstoy, a figure for whom Nabokov felt strong (though very selective) admiration, "the greatest Russian writer of prose fiction" (137). To be sure, as a man of his time and the bearer of an oversized conscience, Tolstoy always ran the danger of violating Nabokov's Second Law, crushing his art with "general ideas" and moral lessons. Eventually he almost succeeded in doing so: "He ruthlessly sacrificed the giant of an artist that he was to a rather pedestrian and narrow-minded though well-meaning philosopher that he had chosen to become" (140). But before this happened, and occasionally even afterward, Tolstoy the artist did create several sublime masterpieces, the greatest of which is *Anna Karenin* (not *Anna Karenina*—according to another Nabokov law, only ballerinas have the right to use the feminine form of their surnames in Western languages). Nabokov is strangely silent about *War and Peace,* indeed about all of Tolstoy's earlier work, but *Anna Karenin* always remained for him the pinnacle of Russian narrative art.

In his very truncated biographical introduction to Tolstoy Nabokov voices his general disdain for biography ("I hate the vulgarity of 'human interest'") and issues his famous challenge ("No biographer will ever catch a glimpse of my private life"). Concerning Tolstoy Nabokov gave his students virtually no

biographical facts and no bibliographical survey, but offered them a fairly conventional dualistic conceptualization of Tolstoy's life as a long struggle between "his sensual temperament and his supersensitive conscience" (138). That supersensitive conscience, alas, led Tolstoy to believe that "seeking the Truth" was more important than "the easy, vivid, brilliant discovery of the illusion of truth through the medium of his artistic genius" (141).

But at least we have *Anna Karenin*. Nabokov's conducted tour through that novel is something of a tour de force, perhaps not comprehensive enough, but illuminating in the parts singled out for close inspection. First, he identifies certain general features of Tolstoy's art, especially the primary mystery, Tolstoy's uncannily perfect sense of time. "Tolstoy's prose keeps pace with our pulses, his characters seem to move with the same swing as the people passing under our window while we sit reading his book" (142). It is this more than anything else that makes Tolstoy's characters seem so real. This scarcely perceptible heartbeat in Tolstoy's novels is not to be confused with the conventional time marked by clocks and calendars. Juggling several different time-lines, as he does in his big novels, Tolstoy sometimes slips, and even in *Anna Karenin* "there are terrific skiddings on the frozen road of time" (142). Nabokov made a meticulous effort to pin down and correlate the chronologies on the Kitty-Lyovin and the Anna-Vronski time-lines; he found decidedly imperfect synchronization, coming to the conclusion that the "mated" characters live faster than the "mateless" ones. (Nabokov's calculations of time in *Anna Karenin* have been interestingly explored and in part challenged by Vladimir Alexandrov and Michel Aucouturier.[12]) But fictional clocks need not tick at the same rate as real ones. Nabokov's point is that whatever the clocks and calendars may say, readers somehow *perceive* Tolstoy's novel-time as identical with the rhythms by which we actually live our lives.

Despite Tolstoy's insistent urge to obtrude himself into his narratives, "in those great chapters that are his masterpieces the author is invisible," thus meeting the Flaubertian prescription, "to be everywhere as God in His universe is" (143). When Tolstoy violates this admonition, the results, even in the sublime *Anna Karenin*, are chapters full of dull disquisitions on such topics as agriculture, elections, and zemstvos. Perhaps it is Nabokov's lack of interest in agriculture that leads him to omit from his tour of great chapters the lyric mowing scene that has captivated so many readers.

Of course, the novel is long and rich, and Nabokov's time was limited; his method of reading aloud long passages meant that discussion had to be highly selective. As a tour leader, Nabokov often does little more than point—"Look at that! Isn't it beautiful?"—as he does, for instance, at the skating party where Lyovin rather awkwardly first confesses his love for Kitty; or the scene of the birth of their first child. Nabokov even cites this parturition scene as a manifestation of evolutionary advance in literature, "probing deeper and deeper layers of life" (164), since neither Homer nor Cervantes would ever have attempted such a thing.

Elsewhere Nabokov's keen eye discerns important linkages and juxtapositions within the novel. He duly notes the parallel between Vronski's behavior at the steeplechase after breaking the back of his mare, Frou-frou, and after the first consummation of his and Anna's love—the same "trembling lower jaw" is found in both scenes. Nabokov also notes the parallel between Stiva Oblonski's early pleasure-focussed dream and the fateful, prophetic nightmare experienced by both Anna and Vronski, anticipating her tragic end. After an expected sideswipe at "the Viennese doctor's rather drab and pedantic mind" (175), Nabokov expounds his own dream theory. "A dream is a show—a theatrical piece staged within the brain in a subdued light before a somewhat muddleheaded audience. . . . The impressions the dream collects on its stage . . . are obviously filched from our waking life" (176). Nabokov carefully collects the elements "filched" from the waking lives of both Anna and Vronski and shows how, though originally disparate, these were in both cases put together by the "experimental producer" into the same nightmare. The fact that two people dream the same dream, a dream that also anticipates the tragic finale of Anna's life, does not arouse any doubts in Nabokov about plausibility. It seems to be one of those rare instances that fall under the protection of Nabokov's Fourth Law, a glimpse such as great art occasionally affords of the workings of forces emanating from a transcendent world beyond this one. Similarly, the "flickering light symbolizing Kitty's baby" is linked to "the light Anna will see just before she dies. Death is soul birth for Tolstoy" (180)—as it clearly is for Nabokov.

Nabokov belongs to the pro-Anna class of readers, those who seek, if not to exonerate her entirely, at least to mitigate her moral responsibility for her downfall. "Anna is not just a woman, not just a splendid specimen of womanhood, she is a woman with a full, compact, important moral nature" (144). There is, to be sure, a demonic side to her: she is the "evil enchantress" who destroys Kitty's romance with Vronski. But this seems to be virtually the only manifestation of her demonic side. The book's motto, "Vengeance is mine, I shall repay" cannot refer to Anna's adultery, since other society ladies have with impunity as many adulterous affairs as they like, just as long as they preserve a facade of decorum. To love frankly and openly, as Anna does, cannot be adjudged a moral fault. The true moral of the book can be deduced not from the motto but from the comparison of the two plots. "The Anna-Vronski alliance was founded only in carnal love and therein lay its doom," whereas with the Lyovin-Kitty couple the "riches of sensual nature [are] still there, but balanced and harmonious in the pure atmosphere of responsibility, tenderness, truth, and family joys" (147).

Sterner moralists might feel that Nabokov weights the moral balance too heavily in the heroine's favor. He credits her, for instance, with "wisdom and grace" (148n) in bringing about the reconciliation between Dolly and Stiva, although this "wisdom" consists only in persuading Dolly to wink at her husband's philandering; Anna makes not the slightest effort to induce her

brother to modify his irresponsible behavior. Likewise, Nabokov takes little note of Anna's deliberate encouragement of Vronski's attentions, and most importantly, he plays down Anna's failings as a mother—her abandonment of Seryozha and her egregious neglect of Annie, her child by Vronski.

The Tolstoy chapter as printed contains not only Nabokov's lecture notes but also material he had prepared in 1954 for a projected revised edition of *Anna Karenin*:[13] lists of characters, "Commentary Notes" to approximately the first 100 pages of the novel, and a draft introduction, which appears under the labels "Characterization," "Tolstoy's Timing," "Structure," and "Imagery."

The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of "The Death of Ivan Ilyich." Nabokov lavishes on this work a whole barrage of A plusses: "that greatest of great short stories" (140), "Tolstoy's most artistic, most perfect, and most sophisticated achievement" (235)—these encomiums despite the fact that Tolstoy the preacher made "a half-hearted attempt" to turn the story into a moralizing fable. Nabokov analyzes the techniques of style and structure that converge to produce the overwhelming contrast between the "egotism, falsity, hypocrisy, and above all automatism" of Ivan Ilyich's life and the transcendent ending of his death, "the magic of metamorphosis, the magic of return tickets to princedoms as rewards for spiritual reform" (242). It never seems to occur to Nabokov that it might be possible to classify "Ivan Ilyich" as a moralizing fable that is *at the same time* a superlative work of art.

For Nabokov Chekhov was also a greatly admired predecessor, but one easier to live with than Tolstoy. Chekhov obviously was an admirable, even a noble man. He wrote to help support his family while putting himself through medical school; he treated peasants gratis; he built schools, stocked libraries, planted trees, travelled to Sakhalin to survey conditions there for prisoners, exiles, and also the indigenous population and to agitate for their improvement. He was keenly aware of human weakness, foolishness, and cruelty, but he could also recognize generosity, creativity, and love. He was never pretentious. He was immensely talented, and he died young, with his talent far from exhausted. It is hard not to like and admire Chekhov; though there have been some who succeeded in that, Nabokov was not one of them. If he scolds Chekhov for occasional artistic lapses, it is in a fraternal spirit, and the ultimate A plus, "genius," is awarded over and over again.

The biographical introduction apparently owes a good deal, we are told by the editor (246n), to an article by Kornei Chukovski.[14] Nabokov follows Chukovski in opposing the conventional image of Chekhov as the "poet of twilight Russia," mopey, melancholy, and tubercular, affirming instead a vigorous, active Chekhov, bursting with energy and talent, determined to leave the world a better place than he found it. Though he accepts the Chukovski Chekhov as the true one, Nabokov nevertheless presents a composite picture of the typical "Chekhov intellectual" that seems almost as conventional, and as incomplete, as the repudiated one of Chekhov the man. "Chekhov's intellectual was a man who combined the deepest human decency of which

man is capable with an almost ridiculous inability to put his ideals and principles into action . . . unhappy in love, hopelessly inefficient in everything—a good man who cannot make good" (253). No doubt there are such Pnin-like people in Chekhov, especially in the plays, but do they any more deserve the label of "Chekhov's intellectuals" than the thinkers and doers, the tree-planters and ecologists, school-builders, distinguished scientists, and the many good doctors? To be sure, Chekhov never makes it easy for his doers, let alone his lovers: the world is a resistant place, problems are many, resources slender, life short, and love often transient or unreciprocated. But energy and creativity are no more lacking in Chekhov's characters than they were in Chekhov the man. Especially it is hard to support Nabokov's conclusion, which he ascribes to Chekhov, that "until real moral and spiritual culture, physical fitness and wealth come to the Russian masses, the efforts of the noblest and best meaning intellectuals who build bridges and schools while the vodka pub is still there, will come to naught," and that "pure art, pure science, pure learning . . . will in the long run attain more" (250). Surely a close reading of Chekhov could lead to the opposite conclusion, though perhaps Chekhov would not see any need to choose between pure and applied mental endeavor: don't we need both?

Nabokov as a literary tour-leader is at his best in his excursion through two late Chekhov stories. He especially admires Chekhov's ability to "realize" a character or a scene with seemingly insignificant details and without making the details too heavily symbolic: the thick black eyebrows of Gurov's wife in "The Lady with the Little Dog," for example, or the watermelon which Gurov rather callously eats after he and Mme. von Dideritz have first made love while she weeps over her lost virtue. "All the traditional rules of story telling have been broken in this wonderful short story," Nabokov concludes. "There is no problem, no regular climax, no point at the end" (262). One might dispute some of these "no's," but Nabokov has correctly sensed a special Chekhov quality—a subtlety, balance, and lack of obvious effects that are his trademark. In his summary Nabokov does once slip into a conventional romantic formula, off-key for Chekhov. At their last meeting Gurov ". . . knows that only death will end their love," says Nabokov. Actually Gurov knows no such thing. All Chekhov says is that "it was clear to both of them that the end was still far off, and that what was to be most complicated and difficult for them was only just beginning."

Nabokov, however, rises to the critical heights with his list of seven "typical features" of Chekhov's narrative art (262–63). His formulations are so right, so elegantly put and so succinct that it would be impossible to summarize them. They should be quoted in full in every introduction to Chekhov. Alas, there is no space for them here.

Nabokov's presentation of "In the Gully" (better known as "In the Ravine") is equally engaging, though again more a guided tour than an analysis. The "Notes on *The Seagull*" show some of the thought Nabokov had

given to the technique of playwriting. Historically, according to Nabokov, Chekhov's signal achievement was that "he showed the right way to escape the dungeon of deterministic causation . . . and burst the bars holding the art of drama captive" (285). Avoiding unnatural plot concentration on "stars" and contrived stage effects, Chekhov made the drama echo the vagueness and muddle of life, its confusion, misdirected aspirations and cross-purposes. *The Seagull* is not without its flaws, however; even Chekhov errs. Nabokov finds the character of Nina Zarechnaia "slightly false"—too much the poetical young woman with a tragic destiny. Most of all, the third act falls off badly, with several sins against plausibility. Trigorin unnaturally returns from the library before reading the stagey message from Nina quoted from his own book ("If any time you need my life, just come and take it"), and his verbalized response ("Why does my own heart sink so painfully?") is "poor stuff" (290). The play fully recovers in the last act, however, and its ending is "magnificent" in the delicate handling of Treplyov's suicide.

Nabokov's chapter on Gorky is an odd amalgam—a fairly detailed and not unsympathetic presentation of the writer's biography, followed by a completely dismissive statement of Gorky's standing as an author of fiction; sandwiched between these two is a bare assertion, without demonstration, of the dramatic effectiveness of *The Lower Depths*, followed by a long and uncharacteristically idealized account of the Moscow Art Theater and the Stanislavsky "method." Bowers has evidently pieced all this together from fragmentary notes, and it is not at all clear what Nabokov actually did with Gorky in his course on Russian literature.

Only two stories by Gorky are mentioned, "On the Rafts" (1895), which is called "typical," and "Twenty-six Men and a Girl" (1899). Both are ridiculed for "schematic characters," "mechanical structure," and "low level of culture." "I have heard intelligent people maintain," Nabokov concludes, "that the utterly false and sentimental story 'Twenty-six Men and a Girl' is a masterpiece." (One of those "intelligent people," incidentally, was D. S. Mirsky, who said it in print, but Nabokov does not name him here.) In fact, "it is all pink candy with just that amount of soot clinging to it to make it attractive" (305–306). In the biographical section Nabokov mentions details from the first volume of Gorky's autobiography, *Childhood*, now widely acknowledged as a genuine masterpiece, but he never takes it up as a literary work, one belonging to the inner circle of great Russian autobiographies (or pseudo-autobiographies), including Tolstoy's *Childhood*, Aksakov's *Family Chronicle*, Herzen's *My Past and Thoughts*, and his own *Speak, Memory*.

In the *Lectures* as published the Gorky chapter is followed by two brief essays, "Philistines and Philistinism" and "The Art of Translation." These clearly were never "lectures" at all. The first is the draft of an article, a variant of the famous definition of *poshlost'* ("poshlust") from the Gogol book, with some direct auto-plagiarism from that source (one is gratified to find "Grandma of the beaming wrinkles" still thriving here).

Though the editor does not note the fact, "The Art of Translation" actually reprints a published article.[15] The views expressed are those of the period of *Three Russian Poets,* when Nabokov still believed it possible—and manfully struggled to accomplish the feat—successfully to recapture in one language the beauties of poetry in another. By the time he completed his version of *Evgeny Onegin*, of course, he had become a fanatical proponent of the most rigid prose literalism, maintaining that poetry simply cannot ever be translated as poetry.

Like *Lectures on Literature*, the book ends with a brief piece rather pretentiously titled by the editor "L'Envoi." This send-off once again tells students that literature is about images, not "general ideas," and that Russian literature did not end with Tolstoy and Chekhov.

Taken as a whole, the *Lectures on Russian Literature* are obviously uneven, a mixture of acutely insightful readings, hastily put-together facts, and persistent prejudices. Clearly, they are not what Nabokov would have written had he revised them for publication himself: it took work to make Nabokov Nabokov. From all accounts his classroom manner also added much charm and pungency that is lost on the printed page. Furthermore, Nabokov never regarded teaching as his primary profession. It was rather something he had to do to support himself and his family while devoting as much time and energy as he could to his career as a writer. He abandoned teaching as soon as he could afford to. While he did it, however, he did it well. His knowledge of Russian literature was that of a highly cultivated reader with a professional interest in the subject. Except in the case of Pushkin, about whom he made himself a world-class scholar, Nabokov's knowledge of the other writers he taught, and especially of the scholarly literature concerning them, would probably not have been sufficient to qualify him to train graduate students; but for undergraduate classes it was more than sufficient. If the happy few among his students, and the same among the readers of the book, have learned from him to be "thrilled by the magic imageries of the master-forger, the fancy-forger, the conjuror, the artist" (11), the ghost of Nabokov the teacher will be well satisfied.

Hugh McLean

NOTES

1. Boyd, 1991, pp. 22–23.
2. Ibid., pp. 25, 677.
3. Ibid., p. 109.
4. Ibid., p. 173n.
5. Ibid., 173, 602.
6. Ibid., pp. 607, 643.
7. Nabokov, "The Lermontov Mirage," p. 32.
8. Ibid., p. 34.
9. Ibid., p. 31.

10. Karlinsky, 1983.
11. Kropotkin.
12. Alexandrov, 1982; Aucouturier.
13. Boyd, 1991, p. 258.
14. Chukovski.
15. Nabokov, "The Art of Translation," 1941.

LEPIDOPTERA STUDIES

The serendipity of my life as a scholar in the natural sciences and a devotee of some of the humanities allowed me, by chance, to know personally the great writer and excellent butterfly researcher Vladimir Nabokov. It was by lucky chance that in June of 1946 I rushed out of military service as a medical entomologist in World War II to the doctoral program in Biology at Harvard, during the period when Vladimir Nabokov was there. Almost immediately on arrival, I became closely acquainted with the entomologists in the venerable Museum of Comparative Zoology, just across Divinity Avenue from my student office in the Biological Laboratories, and there was Mr. Nabokov, the curator of Lepidoptera. He and I were quite equally passionate about butterflies, and friendship came easily. During the many years that followed, I became aware from secondary sources that Nabokov's dignity and superior intellectual standards did not always permit people who sought him out to pass across the boundaries into such cordiality. As I reported to Brian Boyd in a 1987 interview, my then wife, Jeanne, and I were occasionally invited to socialize with the Nabokovs in their apartment, at 8 Craigie Circle near Harvard, following monthly meetings of the Cambridge Entomological Club. Our very tasty refreshments were jars of baby fruit, which were clearly favorites of V.N. and Véra. My memory is of pureed apple, peach, apricot, pear (but not "quince, beech [sic] plum, or grape").[1]

Nabokov's hauteur shows up in unexplained imagery in his writings, not least in his use of butterfly species to symbolize events in the novels. I have long supposed that Nabokov enjoyed deftly layering meanings in his passages—the first layer being that of most writers, understandable to any reader; beneath that a second layer often with clever but subtle puns; one or more deeper strata to be enjoyed by only the most erudite cognoscenti, or perhaps by no one but Vladimir Nabokov and his wife Véra. A small sample of his amusement with words is this piece in a letter he wrote to me concerning a rejectable criticism by a prominent butterfly worker, the late F. Martin Brown, of a published study by Vladimir Nabokov: "Dear Charles, Many thanks for consenting to publish my reply to Brown. I knew you would not let me down (sorry for this rhyme)" (January 8, 1951).

I have been musing once again in recent months on my brief personal acquaintance with V.N., his scientific writings, and his savoring of his lifelong love of butterfly collecting. His sufficiently intimate recollections of his youth in *Speak, Memory* especially engross me, and I conclude that only a thoroughly knowledgeable lepidopterist could fully appreciate that major share of Nabokov's persona. Notice that he listed 28 page references to "Lepidoptera" (not "butterflies") in the index for *Speak, Memory*. Lepidoptera are used so pervasively in his novels, that analysts have of course singled out the butterflies and moths in various enumerations and critiques, to my mind more or less inadequately. There is a helpful gathering of Lepidoptera uses by Karges (1985), but as a specialist I found errors of detail on too many pages of this little book, and I caution literary scholars not to use it as a consistently authoritative source. But Karges took the pains to search the novels for Lepidoptera and to imagine what each symbolized in Nabokov's writing. I suppose that Nabokov would not have appreciated many of the interpretations. V.N.'s attitude comes clear in his 1959 letter to Pyke Johnson on proposed jacket designs for the *Collected Poems*: "I like the two colored butterflies on the jacket but they have bodies of ants, and no stylization can excuse a simple mistake. To stylize adequately one must have complete knowledge of the thing. I would be the laughing stock of my entomological colleagues if they happened to see these impossible hybrids" (*SL* 284).

While the present piece was being edited for publication, a new volume on Nabokov's Lepidoptera was published as the catalogue for an exposition titled "Les Papillons de Nabokov," to be exhibited at the Cantonal Museum of Zoology of Lausanne, Switzerland, 26 November 1993–29 January 1994).[2] Soon after Nabokov's death, Véra Nabokov had followed his instructions (see *SO* 191) to present to that museum the several thousand Lepidoptera specimens collected by the Nabokovs after their return to Europe in 1960. Using the time-honored technique of many lepidopterists, the Nabokovs had placed each freshly caught specimen, with wings folded over the back, in a small transparent triangular envelope carrying the name of the insect; these triangles had been grouped in larger envelopes bearing the name of the locality and presumably the date of capture, and those envelopes were "méticuleusement disposées" ("meticulously arranged") in cigar boxes and candy tins. The Lausanne museum had promised to preserve this Nabokov collection intact, a segregation commitment not usual for most major museums. They set out to relax and mount on entomological pins 4,323 specimens, truly "un immense travail" ("an enormous job").[3] After mounting, the Lepidoptera were pinned into 43 entomological cases, grouped by locality. "Cette ordonnance permet de suivre Vladimir Nabokov dans ses pérégrinations européennes" ("This grouping allows one to follow Vladimir Nabokov's European peregrinations").[4] This is a quite wonderful way to conserve the beloved captures the great writer made during his later years; on page 175, the collecting calendar from 1961 to 1975 is listed in detail. The Lausanne museum's completion of

the task and the opening of the exhibition of the specimens were the occasion for the issue of the catalogue, which consists of three sections. I consider this small volume to be an adequately definitive treatment of the subject, assiduously researched and written with admirable insights by both authors. And yet errors of detail are disturbingly frequent, and literature scholars would be too often misled. Understandably, it is mainly significant for Nabokov's collecting after the American years, so it is not much linked to Nabokov's research as a scientist. Some attempt was made to explain entomologically the names used by Nabokov in his American publications.

The first section begins with a biographical sketch of Nabokov that includes a series of fascinating quotes, many accompanied by related photographs of the writer and of Lepidoptera. It concludes with a list of Nabokov's major writings, compiled by Dieter E. Zimmer, ending with a record of nineteen papers and notes on Lepidoptera. The latter list, expanded with annotations and the addition of three book reviews, is repeated in the second section. Both versions of titles and page numbers regrettably have errors.

The second section, "Nabokov's Lepidoptera: An Annotated Multilingual Checklist," also by Zimmer, has another fine selection of Nabokov's comments on butterflies, an explanation for non-specialists of the world families of butterflies (many hardly related to Nabokov's work and out of date), a list of butterflies and moths that Nabokov named or that were named after him, a very long list of "Lepidoptera Mentioned in Nabokov's Published English Writings" (pp. 63–147), a list of scientists mentioned in the writings (biographical details too often misleading), and three bibliographies. This section is excessively replete with errors of detail, such as the wildly overstated number of species of Lybitheidae and Bombycidae, the error that Cossidae are "mainly in Australia" (pp. 49, 50), that the first brood of *Lycaeides melissa samuelis* peaks in early July (p. 58) (much too late), that *Eurytides marcellus* reaches New England as a resident (I consider *Iphiclides podalirius* to be so similar superficially to *marcellus*, that the Gentile painting could well be the former).

The final section, the catalogue of the Nabokov European collection in the Lausanne Museum, is by Michel Sartori. It has taxonomic rigor, although using the extreme generic splitting of the Higgens and Riley field guide reference; under every species and subspecies the Nabokov collecting localities are given, a valuable research record.

Even the meticulous scholarship throughout Professor Boyd's marvellous biography (1991) has a scattering of minor (even some major) slips in entomological matters. Boyd assumed that V.N. "would himself be the most famous lepidopterist in the world" by the time he left America;[5] "famous" may be a saving word, but Nabokov would never have countenanced such a claim to leadership; he knew well that some dozens of distinguished full-time authorities would better be so ranked. Insignificant to non-entomologists may be reporting V.N.'s first mentor at the Harvard Museum of Comparative

Zoology, Nathan Banks, as "Nathaniel."[6] The "family of moths known as the pugs" is in fact one genus of the vast family Geometridae, and the "two entirely new species, one of which McDunnough gratefully named in his honor *Eupithecia nabokovi*" are the same two "captures [that] were designated as type specimens."[7] Dr. McDunnough, in that publication, actually named four new species of *Eupithecia* which had been collected by V.N. at Alta, Utah, in 1943; the one found by no one else and nowhere else McDunnough named for V.N., with the prefatory statement: "A fine lot of material collected recently by Mr. V. Nabokov of Cambridge, Mass., in Utah, has been most helpful in augmenting my series in many cases, and I am very grateful for the opportunity of studying this collection."[8] Such slips bothered V.N. and would have been righted by him if they had appeared in Andrew Field's horrendous prepublication typescript for Nabokov: *His Life in Part* (published mostly uncorrected in 1977). I also wince when reading, throughout Brian Boyd's fine book, his consistent failure to capitalize Lepidoptera, a very proper name that zoological practice expects to be capitalized like all Latin names above the species.

The Harvard Years

Although I was extremely busy in Cambridge, I enjoyed seeing V.N. often, hearing his thoughts on recent specimen collecting and research, and, of course, telling him mine. At that time he was formally a part-time research fellow in the Entomology department of the museum, but he was *de facto* curator of the Lepidoptera room; his other simultaneous position was as lecturer in comparative literature at Wellesley College. (A confused and deplorably error-filled account of this period was published in the *Harvard Magazine* [Zaleski, 1986].) V.N. found few close contacts on the M.C.Z. staff, which included leading authorities on lacewings, parasitic and hunting wasps, ground beetles, flies and social wasps, ticks, and fossil insects, but not the butterflies which were his sole concern. So although the others welcomed him as an interesting colleague, there was little he could share in detail until in 1945–46 an emerging young specialist in the Blue butterflies, Harry K. Clench, arrived in the neighborhood, also from U. S. Army service (Clench's father was longtime Curator of Mollusks in the Museum), and a few months later I moved in.

V.N. and I were truly kindred spirits, and as we made our summer plans for 1947, we found we would both be in Colorado, so I arranged to pick him up at his summer headquarters at Columbine Lodge, near Long's Peak beside Rocky Mountain National Park, and take him for a day-long collecting excursion to a fabulous montane butterfly locality, the great Tolland bogs east of the Moffat tunnel. V.N. did not drive cars, and on this day he and I went to Tolland, talking animatedly the whole two-way drive. I was under the vague impression that he was a writer of novels, presumably erudite works for a

special readership, but we never talked about that side of his productivity. I later realized he did plenty of new writing on his summer trips to butterfly localities. For some years he, his wife Véra, and their lanky young son Dmitri would go for long summer stints to famous butterfly localities in the West where he knew of critical unsolved problems in butterfly classification. Field ecological studies, along with collecting substantial batches of specimens for later museum analysis, are necessary in such research. His long experience in Europe and now North America, coupled with his brainy approach to everything in life, made him an intuitive, skillful master at field work. Successful though his science was, it was clear that he most loved butterfly collecting—a passion that I shared with him.

The summer based at Long's Peak was part of a productive series from 1941, only a year after his arrival in the United States, to 1959, two years before his permanent move to Europe. His important butterfly collecting sojourns, always with Véra and often with Dmitri, were:

1941—Grand Canyon, Arizona (June 9); "the yellow hills" of Los Altos, California (much of the summer during a Stanford University teaching job); Yosemite National Park (early September).

1942—Okefenokee Swamp (October 13), while doing academic lecturing nearby.

1943—Alta Lodge, high in the Wasatch Mountains above Salt Lake City, Utah (much of the summer); a room at the Lodge was rented inexpensively from James Laughlin, the wealthy founder of V.N.'s publishing house, New Directions. V.N. collected butterflies and moths intensively and worked on his new novel, *Bend Sinister*, and his book on Nikolai Gogol.

1946—Newfound Lake, New Hampshire (June 27–August 18), where he had mediocre collecting, but he told me he saw unmistakably but could not catch a *Strymon ontario*, a hairstreak butterfly of great rarity in the Northeast. He was on vacation to recover from acute nervous exhaustion after intensive teaching, writing, and museum curating.

1949—Battle Mt. Ranch and Teton Pass Ranch, Jackson Hole area, Wyoming, and vicinity (late June to late August); intensive collecting and apparently very little writing.

1950—Karner, near Albany, New York (late May), finding in the wild his own Blue butterfly (*Lycaeides melissa samuelis* Nabokov; he stopped there repeatedly, in 1956 and later years.

1952—Snowy Range and Sierra Madre region of southeastern Wyoming (late June to mid July); Rock Butte Court, Dubois region, western Wyoming (most of August). He made large and important collections and finally began work on translations of *Eugene Onegin* and the *Song of Igor's Campaign.*

1953—"at a ranch near Portal, Arizona, at a rented house in Ashland, Oregon, and at various motels in the west and midwest, I managed, between butterfly-hunting and writing *Lolita* and *Pnin*, to translate *Speak, Memory* with the help of my wife, into Russian" (*SM* 12).

1954—near Taos, New Mexico (mid-June to mid-August) where he did much work on *Anna Karenin* and some interesting butterfly collecting in nearby canyons.

1956—a ranchito outside Mt. Carmel, southern Utah (May 15–July 12), with superb collecting and work on the Lermontov translation; northwestern Wyoming and Beartooth Pass region of Montana (mid to late July); Minnesota and southern Michigan (later July); with excellent collecting.

1958—Lake View Cabins on eastern edge of Glacier National Park, Montana (June 10 to early July), and Waterton Lakes National Park, Alberta; for important collecting.

1959—Gatlinburg, Tennessee (mid-April); Big Bend National Park, Texas (early May); Oak Creek Canyon, Arizona (mid-May to late July); with outstanding collecting, their last in America.

Nabokov's first four Lepidopterological publications were on Palearctic butterflies.[9] Having a rich background with European butterflies, he was soon seeing ecological similarities in North America, typically unrecognized by American lepidopterists until he wrote about them. For example, he saw that many butterflies that could be found as breeders in most or all years in northern places were not actually permanent residents there, because they failed to survive the cold winters and had to filter back north from their permanent southern territory.[10]

He was a leading authority on a group of the family Lycaenidae, known as the Blues. But he also worked out a complex problem in a study of the southwestern satyrs, *Neonympha*, based on his alert discovery that specimens his party caught at the South Rim of Grand Canyon in 1941 were not the same species as the long-familiar *Neonympha henshawi*.[11]

His very original studies of the Blues throughout the Harvard years, in which he boldly turned away from the mainstream presumptions of more routine classifiers, ended with his 1948 move to a tenured professorship in literature at Cornell University. A favorite acquaintance there in the insect collection at Comstock Hall was Professor Wm. T.M. Forbes. Nabokov presented to Cornell the many specimens he accumulated during his Cornell years. Prof. J.G. Franclemont of Cornell tells me that Nabokov and Forbes "were always buddy-buddy." V.N. had left at Harvard most of the specimens collected during his Harvard years.

He had enthusiastic plans to produce three large books on Lepidoptera. One "would contain my adventures with leps in various countries, especially in the Rocky Mountain states, the discovery of new species, and the description of some fantastic cases of adaption . . . a fantastic blend of science, art and entertainment" (*SL* 186) to be published by Doubleday. The second would be "*The Butterflies of Europe*, a complete catalogue of all the butterflies of Europe west of Russia, with color photographs of all the species and the main subspecies, and notes by Nabokov on classification, habitat, and behavior" to be published by Weidenfeld. The third was to be on *Butterflies in Art*, a subject

that had interested him for many years, to be published by McGraw-Hill.[12] He also considered writing a modern revision of the standard text on North American butterflies by W.J. Holland, *The Butterfly Book*. None came to fruition; but what fascination there would have been in his versions of any of these![13]

The Butterfly Taxa of V. Nabokov

Nabokov named ten new species and subspecies and renamed another; all but one or two appear to be valid after many years of subsequent study. He named nine new genera, and the conclusions are not completely settled on their status; his thoughtfully discussed reasons for elevating traditional subgeneric units to full genera may still be appealing as new research develops, perhaps via molecular genetic analysis. The morphological, "dead-specimen," characteristics are sometimes superficial resemblances rather than phylogenetic, and modern molecular genetics reveals so many indicators of affinity in evolution that "dead-specimen" puzzles can be confidently solved.

Plebejus (Lysandra) cormion Nabokov, 1941. Named as a new species, but with possibility that it is a hybrid *P. (L.) coridon* X *P. (Meleageria) daphnis*. Fine photos in *Speak, Memory*, p. 274.

Carterocephalus canopunctatus Nabokov, 1941. Resembles *C. dieckmanni* Graeser and near *C. gemmatus* Leech.

Neonympha dorothea Nabokov, 1942. Transferred to genus *Euptychia* and then to *Cyllopsis*, as *C. pertepida dorothea* (Nabokov), by L. D. Miller.[14]

Neonympha dorothea avicula Nabokov, 1942. Also transferred to *Cyllopsis*, as *C. pertepida avicula* (Nabokov), by Miller.[15]

Neonympha dorothea edwardsi Nabokov, 1942. Sunk by Miller to synonymy under *C. pertepida dorothea* as a seasonal color form.[16]

Neonympha maniola Nabokov, 1942. Also transferred to *Cyllopsis*, as *C. pertepida maniola* (Nabokov), by Miller.[17]

Lycaeides melissa subsp. *samuelis* nom. nov. Nabokov, 1944. Long familiar subspecies had regularly been called *scudderi* Edwards, which Nabokov proved to be in the different species, *L. argyrognomon*; Nabokov used Samuel Hubbard Scudder's given name in re-naming the eastern entity. His work is universally accepted. Scudder was one of his antecedent heroes, and Nabokov was pleased to leave both his surname and given name in the formal Latin literature.

Genus *Plebulina* Nabokov, 1944, created for a single distinctive known American desert species, generally accepted.

Genus *Icaricia* Nabokov, 1946, created for several Northern Hemisphere species, generally accepted.

Genera *Parachilades* Nabokov, 1945; *Pseudothecla* Nabokov, 1945, from South America, created for a distinctive known single species.

Genus *Pseudochrysops* Nabokov, 1945, from Haiti, created for a distinctive known single species.

Genus *Cyclargus* Nabokov, 1945, created for four known species from West Indies and Florida. Now considered a synonym or a subgenus of *Hemiargus*. Nabokov was opposed to the subgeneric category here, with some justification. There is an ongoing dispute among classifiers of insects, other animals, and plants as to what hierarchical level is suitable for many clusters of related species. The "splitters," definitely including Nabokov, argue that any separate cluster of ancestrally related species is most appropriately treated as a full genus; "lumpers" argue that this makes the treatment of genera excessively cluttered and not indicative of relatedness of separate but close clusters. The latter need is served by treating the lesser clusters as subgenera under broad generic umbrellas.

Genus *Echinargus* Nabokov, 1945, created for two (now three) species from the United States and southward, and Trinidad. As with *Cyclargus*, this is now considered a synonym or a subgenus of *Hemiargus* (see above).

Genus *Pseudolucia* Nabokov, 1945, created for two known species from Chile.

Genus *Paralycaeides* Nabokov, 1945, created for single known species from Peru.

Cyclargus erembis Nabokov, 1948, from the West Indies.

Lycaeides argyrognomon sublivens Nabokov, 1949, from Colorado; generally accepted as proposed.

Lycaeides argyrognomon longinus Nabokov, 1949, from northwestern Wyoming; generally accepted.

Lycaeides melissa pseudosamuelis Nabokov, 1949, from Colorado; generally accepted.

Nabokov's Ideas on Biological Mimicry

Nabokov, through much of his writer's life, commented on "natural mimicry" and made it very clear that he considered the Darwinian and neo-Darwinian explanations of biologists to be incorrect. In *Speak, Memory* (p. 125) he wrote: "'Natural selection,' in the Darwinian sense, could not explain the miraculous coincidence of imitative aspect and imitative behavior, nor could one appeal to the theory of 'the struggle for life' when a protective device was carried to a point of mimetic subtlety, exuberance, and luxury far in excess of a predator's power of appreciation. I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception." Earlier he had developed these same ideas in *The Gift*. Professor V.E. Alexandrov explored the mimicry themes with great care and demonstrated the close similarity of the writings of Nabokov with those of P.D. Uspensky and N.N. Evreinov, "both of whom expressed views about artifice in nature that are either identical or close to Nabokov's. Although it cannot be proven definitively, it is quite possible that Uspensky and Evreinov may have been the sources, or inspirations for Nabokov's far-reaching redefinition."[18] Uspensky, more than Nabokov and Evreinov, elaborated long, reasoned arguments on mimicry in rejection of the explanations of evolutionary biologists. Boyd, however, did note that "On his arrival at Wellesley, Nabokov began to write a major article on natural mimicry, with 'furious refutations of 'natural selection' and 'the struggle for life.' It was a theme that had inspired him since childhood. . . . Although he completed the paper by the following spring, it was never published and nothing survives but a fragment embedded in *Speak, Memory*"[19] (see above).

Impressive though the intellectual arguments are of these three writers, it would be unreasonable to take them very seriously in science today. Mimicry and other aspects of adaptive coloration and shape involve such superb and elaborate resemblances that various biologists had in fact more or less vaguely questioned the Darwinian explanations during the early decades of this century. Subsequent publication of so many elegant experimental tests of mimicry and predator learning (starting with the brilliant work of Jane V.Z. Brower) and color-pattern genetics (especially by the Oxford group of E.B. Ford and his students and associates) has caused the collapse of the basic challenges, in my view as a specialist in the field. However, I do guess that Nabokov had such a strong metaphysical investment in his challenge to natural selection that he might have rejected the evolutionary conclusions for his own satisfaction. He was an excellent naturalist and could cite for himself very many examples of perfect resemblances, but he may have been too untrained in the complexities of modern population genetics.

Charles Lee Remington

NOTES

1. Boyd, 1991, p. 115.
2. *Les Papillons de Nabokov*, ed. Michel Sartori, 1993. [All translations from the French are by the Editor.]
3. Goeldlin, in ibid., pp. 1, 2.
4. Ibid., p. 2.
5. Boyd, 1991, p. 16.
6. Ibid., p. 37.
7. Ibid., p. 64.
8. McDunnough, p. 168.
9. Nabokov, "A Few Notes on Crimean Butterflies," "Notes on the Lepidoptera of the Pyrénées Orientales and the Ariège," "On some Asiatic species of *Carterocephalus*," "*Lysandra cormion*, a new European Butterfly."
10. Nabokov, "Butterfly Collecting in Wyoming, 1952," pp. 51–2.
11. Nabokov, "Some new or little-known nearctic *Neonympha*. . . ." See the admiring commentary by Dr. Lee D. Miller, pp. 50, 61, 68.
12. Boyd, 1991, pp. 469–70, 481–82.
13. For a survey of Nabokov's shorter writings on Lepidoptera, see Zimmer, in *Les Papillons de Nabokov*, pp. 160–65.
14. Miller, p. 69.
15. Ibid., p. 75.
16. Ibid., p. 69.
17. Ibid., p. 73.
18. Alexandrov, 1989, p. 132.
19. Boyd, 1991, p. 37.

LIBRARY

The exigencies of exile and the impermanent quarters of a nomadic existence determined Vladimir Nabokov's relation to books. When in 1918 the young Nabokov departed with his family for the Crimea and then Europe, he left behind not only the enchanted island of his childhood and youth but also his father's library. In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov alludes to some of the books he read as a child, including the exotic insect and butterfly works he accidentally discovered while rummaging in the attic. The exact contents of his father's library are never referred to, though we are told that "my father's library taught me to appreciate authentic poetry" (*SM* 113). We also learn that it was the place where his father fenced or boxed, almost daily, and that one day, years later, Nabokov discovered a copy of the catalogue, published in 1904, of the library collection which totaled in excess of 10,000 volumes.

In a more expansive comment to a reviewer's question, Nabokov remarked, "Between the ages of ten and fifteen in St. Petersburg, I must have read more fiction and poetry—English, Russian and French—than in any

other five-year period of my life. I relished especially the works of Wells, Poe, Browning, Keats, Flaubert, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Chekhov, Tolstoy, and Alexander Blok. . . . I was a perfectly normal trilingual child in a family with a large library" (*SO* 42–43). Brian Boyd notes that the young Nabokov's particular favorites were Pushkin, Shakespeare, and Flaubert, along with Gogol, Tolstoy, and Chekhov.[1] According to Boyd, the adolescent Nabokov began his personal collection of books because of his enthusiasm for contemporary poetry: "From a certain table at Volf's bookstore on the Nevsky, where the white paperbacks of recent poetry multiplied like mushrooms, Vladimir built up his own collection of symbolist, acmeist, futurist poets that he stored next to the butterfly books in his bedroom upstairs."[2]

The conditions of exile which led Nabokov through a succession of countries, cities, and abodes determined his subsequent relation to books. It would be no exaggeration to argue that along with the "tables and chairs and lamps and rugs and things" which he never sought to obtain, one could also add "books" (*SO* 27). Nabokov left Russia with little baggage, and the constraints of subsequent travels resulted in numerous books being left behind and others being lost along the way. According to his wife, many were abandoned in Germany, including a large number of autographed Russian émigré works. The Nabokovs carried only what they could of his own works, books absolutely needed for his writing, and a few treasured volumes. The Berlin Public Library and the private libraries of fellow Russian émigrés in Berlin and Paris were used as required. Many books were again left in Paris prior to departure for America because of baggage restrictions and limited financial resources, although some were later forwarded. When the Nabokovs arrived in New York in May 1940 they carried few personal belongings, and the several books which did accompany them were for the most part copies of some (not all) of Nabokov's own published writings.

The years of residence in Cambridge, Massachusetts, spent teaching at Wellesley College and working at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology (1941–48), gave Nabokov access to the Widener and Houghton libraries at Harvard. Ithaca subsequently provided the Cornell University libraries, and forays to Manhattan allowed for visits to the New York Public Library. The financial independence of the post-*Lolita* years, while it could have, did not serve as the occasion to amass a large personal library. If Nabokov did not do so, it was because he was to continue to reside in borrowed quarters and because there was no need. The riches of some of the best European and American public and university libraries had provided him and would continue to provide him with necessary books. As he had once remarked to an interviewer, "A first-rate college library with a comfortable campus around it is a fine milieu for a writer" (*SO* 99). In Switzerland, as necessary, and following his by then well-developed habits, Nabokov visited the library of the University of Lausanne and the English library in Montreux. Libraries had served over the years not only as locations for hours of on-site reading but also as lenders of countless

volumes. In large part they provided the weekly "bedside heap[s] of a dozen volumes," which Nabokov tells us were regularly restocked when they dwindled to a volume or two (*SO* 43).

The collection of the Nabokovs' own books began, not unexpectedly, during their years of residence in apartment 35 at 8 Craigie Circle in Cambridge, Massachusetts. During their eleven years in Ithaca, because of their annual, or occasionally semi-annual, moves from one rental property to another, books not actually needed for work were kept in cardboard cartons, some stored in his university office. When Vladimir and Véra Nabokov settled into their Montreux quarters in 1961, the books were left in storage in Ithaca for several years because they planned then, and later, to return to America. Eventually the books were shipped to Montreux where many continued to remain in their boxes. The Nabokovs' residence in the Montreux Palace Hotel was hardly spacious—five small contiguous hotel rooms. Books were located on shelves, in bureaus and boxes throughout the residence wherever space permitted, with a large overflow housed in a room of the hotel's attic.

The Nabokovs were not book collectors, and as a rule Vladimir Nabokov did not buy books. All of their books were purchased by either Véra or Dmitri Nabokov or else came to the Nabokovs, unsolicited, from admirers, publishers, and friends. It was Nabokov's custom to make use of books as he needed them and then return them to his wife once they had served their purpose. Thereafter no special effort was made to retain them. The books found in the apartment after Nabokov's death were those which "just happened to be saved" according to Véra Nabokov.

The collection in their residence consisted of approximately 1,200 volumes—not counting unbound magazines, journals, newspapers, and copies of Nabokov's own works—in several languages: 63 percent English, 15 percent Russian, 15 percent French, 5 percent German, and 2 percent other (including Italian, Spanish, Danish, Japanese). Books in these other languages, as well as most of the German titles, were mainly scientific and reference works. The preponderance of books in English is not surprising since the volumes were accumulated almost entirely after 1940. It is apparent that the Nabokovs did not set about to recreate his childhood family library, or to create a solid collection of Russian nineteenth-century or émigré literary works, or indeed a collection of any sort. The only books collected, as Nabokov told us in interviews, were lepidopterological, and even here the titles which he and his wife gathered could not match, in abundance and range, the collection in his father's library in St. Petersburg. As for his own works, aside from several of the earliest published items in émigré newspapers, the Nabokovs were able to acquire copies of most everything, including the mass of translations of his works from around the world. The ever-increasing number of these volumes severely taxed the limited space available in their hotel quarters.

In general, Nabokov treated his books gently. One rarely found page corners turned down, and many volumes held 3 x 5 cards or postcards which served as bookmarks. Many of the books showed few markings aside from occasional light gray pencil scorings, although there were notable exceptions. Contrary to what he said in interviews and in his classroom, he marked books not only in gray pencil, but also in red and green pencil, as well as in ink. In texts which were heavily marked—for preparation of classes and lectures, for lepidopterological work, for research and translation—there are extensive scorings, underlinings, circlings, and marginal notations. Heavily notated volumes show that when necessary Nabokov wrote in all the spaces available to him in a book. He employed a regular system for marking texts, with a notation shorthand consisting of "x" (indicating error or something to be noted), "!", "?", combination of "!?", "NB" (note well), "cp" (compare), "DSP" ("up to here," from the Russian "*do sikh por*"). These marks were used systematically. In addition, one frequently found on the inside cover of a book a notation of pages within the volume which carry comments or hold information of possible subsequent use, thus allowing rapid access.

The collection can be subdivided as follows:

Language Reference

There were twenty-five dictionaries in the collection: English, English/Russian, English/German, English/Italian, Russian, Russian/English, Russian/French, French, French/English, German/English, German/ Russian, Italian, and Latin. Nabokov's primary dictionaries were *Webster's New International Dictionary*, Second Edition, unabridged (1960); the seven-volume Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1963–64) (surprisingly there was no copy of Robert's *Dictionnaire alphabetique et analogique de la langue française* or even *Le Petit Robert)*; and Vladimir Dahl's four-volume *Tolkovyi slovar' zhivogo veliko-russkogo iazyka* (1914). Of Dahl's dictionary, Nabokov wrote, "At a bookstall in the Market Place [in Cambridge, England], I unexpectedly came upon a Russian work, a secondhand copy of Dahl's *Interpretative Dictionary of the Living Russian Language* in four volumes. I bought it and resolved to read at least ten pages per day, jotting down such words and expressions as might especially please me, and I kept this up for a considerable time" (*SM*265). That copy may well have carried notations in Nabokov's hand. The unmarked four-volume Dahl which was in the collection, although used by her husband, was the copy Mrs. Nabokov inherited from her father. It had been carefully rebound and carried, embedded on its covers, "VN," the initials shared by both husband and wife. Nabokov's own copy was sold to Professor Karpovich of Harvard University. The thirteen-volume *Oxford English Dictionary* in the collection was bought by Mrs. Nabokov not long before her husband's death, and although he had but little chance to use it, according to Mrs. Nabokov, he liked "having it at his fingertips."

Other language reference works included two editions of Roget's *Thesaurus*, two rhyming dictionaries, *Bartlett's Famous Quotations*, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, a dictionary of French synonyms, a *World Atlas*, J.F. Cirlot's *Dictionary of Symbols*, and eight grammars (three Russian, two French, three German). One of the more interesting titles was the four-volume Schlomann-Oldenbourg's *Illustrierte Technische Wörterbücher*, which gives technical terms in German, English, French, Russian, Italian, and Spanish.

Dictionaries were unmarked except for a number of typographical errors corrected by Nabokov. The grammars showed varying degrees of usage and markings. Cirlot's *Dictionary of Symbols* had penciled-in "x"s next to approximately half the entries. Mrs. Nabokov suggested that these might indicate her husband's knowledge (or use?) of the individual items, but she was not certain. Abrams' *Glossary of Literary Terms* (1957) was heavily marked. Nabokov had corrected or expanded six entries and had penned in forty-seven additional entries ranging from "Anacreontic sonnet" to "Verso. See Recto." On the title page of Redfield's paperback *Capricorn Rhyming Dictionary* (1965), Nabokov wrote, "A computer's idiotic job," and on the back cover, circled, "Computer manufactured!"

Belles Lettres

An eclectic collection of poetry, prose, and drama from American, English, French, and Russian literatures provided the substantial core of the library. Poetry occupied a prominent place. Authors and titles one would expect to find were present—the works he taught and wrote about. Of particular interest were copiously marked editions of Lermontov, Gogol, Pushkin, Fet, Tiutchev, and others used by him for his translations. There were the complete works of Shakespeare in one volume and the collected poems of Yeats, Donne, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Gumilev, and Mandelshtam. But evidently no systematic attempt was made to obtain the complete works of many authors whom Nabokov held in great esteem, such as Proust, Bely, Joyce. According to his wife, Nabokov contemplated buying a complete multi-volume edition of Pushkin's works, but after his *Eugene Onegin* labors he gave up the idea. She herself purchased the complete works of Turgenev and Tolstoy, but said that her husband never used them.

Teaching Texts

This is one of the most interesting segments of the collection. Photocopies of pages from several of these editions adorn the volumes of Nabokov's *Lectures* on Russian and European literature. However, Fredson Bowers, the editor of those editions, drew only sparingly from Nabokov's copious textual notations when reconstituting the lectures. The pages of these editions—of works by Flaubert, Proust, Pushkin, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Cervantes, Stevenson, Kafka,

Joyce, and others—remain a primary source of information on Nabokov's literary views and sensibility. Missing and presumably lost were the teaching copies of Proust and Flaubert in French, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* in Russian, and the English and Russian texts of Gorky's works and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Also gathered here were the grammars and readers that Nabokov used in his Russian-language classes at Wellesley College.

Literary Criticism

The majority of the titles concerned Russian literature. Apparently no effort was made to gather a thorough body of criticism on a single author or a single genre. There was not even a full collection of the published criticism devoted to his own writings. Not surprisingly, the largest body of critical writings related to Pushkin, with works in Russian and English by Tomashevsky, Vinogradov, Tynianov, Gorodetsky, Epifanova, Bayley, Magarshack, Proffer, and others. But this actually represents only a small portion of the many scholarly works used and cited by Nabokov in his two-volume *Eugene Onegin* commentary. There was also a substantial number of books related to *Slovo o polku Igoreve*, the twelfth-century Russian epic which Nabokov translated as *The Song of Igor's Campaign* (1960). Some volumes were heavily notated, such as Clarence Brown's *Mandelstam* (1973), Simon Karlinsky's *Marina Tsvetaeva: Her Life and Art* (1966) and *Letters of Anton Chekhov* (1973), Richard Gregg's *Fedor Tiutchev: The Evolution of a Poet* (1965), F. R. Leavis' *Anna Karenina and Other Essays* (1967), Irwin Weil's *Gorky* (1966) and George Rapell Noyes' *Tolstoy* (1918). Mirsky's standard *History of Russian Literature* was present in several well-marked editions, along with other histories and dictionaries of Russian literature by Smirnovsky, Struve, Snow, Lavrin, Utechin, and Tkhorzhevsky. There were also five well-worn and well-marked volumes from Paul Albert's *La Litterature française* (1874–75) which were used by Nabokov as a student at Cambridge.

Natural Sciences

There were approximately sixty volumes—in English, Russian, French, German, Danish, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, and Swedish—related to lepidoptery. None of the books which Nabokov recalled finding in the attic of his St. Petersburg home was represented (*SM* 121–22). The earliest dated items were copies of *The Entomologist's Annual* for 1858, 1861, 1885. A large segment of this part of the collection was what may be categorized as working books—heavily marked and obviously much used by Nabokov in his lepidopterological studies. There were also volumes which were gathered for his study of the butterfly in art, a project on which he worked for several years. The fine photographic plates in Charles Sterling's *La Nature morte de l'antiquité à*

nos jours (1959), for example, carried Nabokov's penciled-in identifications of the various butterflies and other insects which adorn the still-life plates. The other volumes in this category constituted a sizeable collection of titles dealing with flora and fauna, many lavishly illustated and many apparently unsolicited and sent to the Nabokovs as gifts from individuals and publishers aware of his interests as a naturalist. Many titles were field guides for insects, birds, and flowers of various regions of the world.

Chess

There were approximately twenty chess-related titles in the collection dealing primarily with chess problems, including such titles as *Chess Problems: Introduction to an Art* (1963), *Beauty Is Where You Find It: Delights in the Chess Problem for Novice and Expert* (1972), and *Terms and Themes of Chess Problems* (n. d.). Many problems had been worked by Nabokov and carried his marginal notations; e.g., "neat but banal," "nice," "weak and mechanical," "very pretty," and "NB."

Autographed Volumes

The substantial number of autographed volumes in the library were from admirers, colleagues, and friends. Authors included Vladislav Khodasevich, Andrei Siniavsky, Jean-Jacques Celly, Raymond Queneau, Jorge Guillen, Jose-Luis de Villalonga, Gonzague Saint Bris, Anthony Burgess, E.B. White, Mary McCarthy, Allen Tate, Jacqueline Onassis, William Buckley (eleven titles), Franz Hellens (seven titles), Harry Levin—a colleague and friend from Harvard—(seven titles), Morris Bishop—Nabokov's close friend at Cornell—(twelve titles). The twenty-three autographed titles from Edmund Wilson were dated between 1940 and 1963. They began with the inscription in the 1940 edition of *To the Finland Station*: "To Vladimir Nabokov in the hope of persuading him to think a little better of Lenin"— through the inscription in the 1948 edition of *The Triple Thinkers*: "To Volodya & Vera, with love, and in the hope that some of these essays may help Volodya to straighten out his ideas about the relation of literature to social and political matters"—ending with the inscription in *Night Thoughts*: "To Volodya & Vera with love from EW, Paris, Christmas, 1963." Many of the Wilson volumes were heavily notated. Along with the twenty-three autographed titles, there were also several Wilson titles which were either sent to the Nabokovs by publishers or obtained independently by them. These included the 1972 edition of *A Window on Russia* which was heavily marked by Nabokov, particularly the essay, "The Strange Case of Pushkin and Nabokov," and a copy of the 1971 edition of *Upstate*, with the section "1957," carrying references to the Nabokovs, heavily marked.

Unsolicited Volumes

Nabokov noted in interviews that he received a steady stream of unsolicited books from publishers and publicity directors. There were quite a few of these in the collection in bound and proof copies. Several titles had attached cards or notes which read, as one general example, "We hope this work pleases you, and we would be happy to receive any comments you may have to make." These works, Nabokov told us, remained for the most part unread. But apparently not all since some proof copies and advance copies carried notations or brief remarks.

Other

Included in this category were a good number of art books, guides to museum collections, and such random items as Michelins, a 1914 Baedecker, and other travel guides. Of more interest were the heavily marked volumes dealing with the subject of time which Nabokov gathered as he worked on "The Texture of Time" section of *Ada*, though the collection lacks any marked copies of Henri Bergson's works, the philosopher upon whom he relied the most. Also found here were a few titles touching upon psychology and Freud, such as Eric Berne, *A Layman's Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis* and Andrew Salter, *The Case Against Psychoanalysis.*

The meticulous organization of the Nabokov archives—description, catalogue, arrangement—was done by Professor Brian Boyd. Though working primarily with manuscripts, correspondence, index cards, albums, and such, he also included important books: all titles relating to lepidoptery and chess, all texts from coursework, and other volumes extensively notated by Nabokov. This writer, in the course of cataloguing the entire library, added other important volumes to the archive holdings. The actual number of titles to be found today in the Nabokov Archive, now the property of the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, is approximately one hundred volumes. All the other books, including hundreds with personal dedications and a good many with some measure of notation by Nabokov, remain in the possession of the Nabokov Estate.

Stephen Jan Parker

Notes

1. Boyd, 1990, p. 91.
2. Ibid., pp. 92–93.

LITERARY RETURN TO RUSSIA

During his lifetime, Nabokov was a banned writer in Russia. In all the years following his emigration, not a single line of his was published in his homeland. Not only were his books, especially his Russian ones, subject to confiscation, but so were periodicals that contained texts by him. *Lolita* provided a convenient pretext for this: the novel was proclaimed to be pornography—a move that took advantage of the complications that had accompanied its publication in the West. It thus became easy to keep all of Nabokov out of circulation due to his "pornographic content." There was an appropriate law for this on the books.

One could gain access of Nabokov's works only in the largest libraries, and then only with special permission that was by no means given to everyone. But then, not everyone would have gone to the trouble: for the most part the general public knew of Nabokov only through word of mouth. The semi-official critics mentioned him extremely rarely and with explanations of a disparaging nature.

The only source from which one could glean any information about Nabokov was a note in the *Concise Literary Encyclopedia* (*Kratkaia literaturnaia entsiklopediia*) by O. Mikhailov and L. Chertkov.[1] It said that "Nabokov's work is of an extremely contradictory nature"—although it was not explained what contradictions the authors had in mind. Nabokov's highest achievements were said to be "Korolek" (translated as "The Leonardo") and "Oblako, ozero, bashnia" ("Cloud, Castle, Lake"), "which reflected the growing spiritual brutalization of the bourgeoisie with the rise of fascism in Germany." However, these short stories were offered as an exception to the background of "literary snobbery" that was Nabokov's basic trait. *Lolita* was called an "erotic bestseller," and the reader was left to infer that Nabokov's talent, which was insignificant on the whole, had become completely petty with the march of time.

Of course, the very fact that an article about Nabokov appeared in the authoritative *Concise Literary Encyclopedia* was important because it acknowledged his right to a definite place in Russian literature. Nine years later, when ideological intolerance had intensified in the Soviet Union, the same Mikhailov, who had mentioned Nabokov in passing in one of his articles, wrote about him much more severely, accusing him of having a "mocking wit" (meaning the chapter about Chernyshevsky in *The Gift*) and of rejecting "everything that binds the artist with the ideas of homeland, state, and national continuity [preemstvennost']."[2] "Mocking" would more accurately describe this article's tone, which is preserved even in the articles Mikhailov wrote about Nabokov when the latter had already begun to be published in his native land.

Until this happened, ignorance and forcibly instilled prejudice prevailed. One can only guess what Nabokov himself thought of this. It is hardly worth taking literally the following sentence from his interview with Alfred Appel:

"I have always maintained, even as a schoolboy in Russia, that the nationality of a worthwhile writer is of secondary importance" (*SO* 63). This was not always the case. Even in 1966, the problem could probably not have been solved as easily as Nabokov solved it in this interview: "I think of myself today as an American writer who has once been a Russian one" (*SO* 63). Why, then, does the theme of a secret return to St. Petersburg (renamed Leningrad by the Soviets, and recently changed back to its old name) occupy a central position eight years later in Nabokov's last novel *Look at the Harlequins!*? By a chain of inevitable associations this motif connects Nabokov's last book with *Glory* written forty-two years earlier and its theme of a clandestine return to Russia. The persistence of this theme says much: above all, that a hypothetical return tantalized, attracted, and tormented the writer.

It could not have been any other way, no matter how much Nabokov entreated Russia in the poem "To Russia" to "leave me alone [. . .] I implore you!"; and despite his readiness, "lest we only in dreams come together, all conceivable dreams to forswear," as well as "the books I most love," and even "my own tongue" (*PP* 97). This poem, which was written just before Nabokov's departure for the United States, belongs to his most significant and most heartfelt. It could serve as an epigraph for the complex chapter of Nabokov's biography that deals with his relationship to Russia.

In "Fame," one of the first poems of his American period, the same theme acquires vital new nuances: a "waxlike" "character" tempts the exile with a vision of a return under conditions of guaranteed happiness, so far as that is possible. This cheap temptation is rejected, of course, but it is much more difficult for the poet to convince himself that "the dream / about readers"—chiefly, if not exclusively, Russian ones—is actually "empty," and that "even the break / between me and my land is a trifle." This "waxlike" "character," this "garrulous dust," has its own strong or at least traumatic argument: "No, never will anyone in the great spaces / make mention of even one page of your work." In a typically Nabokovian way this argument is quickly countered by a travesty of Pushkin's poem "The Monument" ("Pamiatnik"). However, the irony at the expense of the "savage" "friends of steppes," who will not leave their abode for the sake of Nabokov's books, still turns out to be a weak defense. All that the speaker has left to defend himself is the consciousness that his "critical secret" can be touched neither by the external circumstances of biography nor by conscience, that "pimp / of my sleepy reflections and projects." From the very beginning, this sort of apologia for art complicated Nabokov's relationship with his Russian audience, which was brought up on different notions about "art in the light of conscience" ("iskusstvo pri svete sovesti"), to use the title of Marina Tsvetaeva's manifesto. The conflict was to flare up again when Nabokov's return was to become a non-metaphoric one.

As long as this had not happened, however, hope, or rather that instinctive knowledge that does not require arguments, serves as a defense against the "waxlike" "character": "But my word, curved to form an aerial viaduct, / spans

the world, and across in a strobe-effect spin / of spokes I keep endlessly passing incognito / into the flame-licked night of my native land" (*PP* 102–12).

In 1942, when "Fame" was written, it was impossible to cite any arguments that spoke even obliquely of the soundness of this knowledge. For a native land wrapped in the dusk of a dictatorship and the alarms of war, Nabokov remained a stranger. The arguments appeared about twenty years later, during "The Thaw."

The prose writer Andrei Bitov has written that the "Nabokovists" are "a specific sect that does not suspect the existence of its own membership (and better for them not to know one another), which arose in the stagnant seventies in Russia, after Nabokov's Russian novels had begun to filter into the country in 'Ardis' reprints."[3] Actually, this "sect," in which Bitov occupies a place of honor, had arisen still earlier, in the mid-sixties. Moreover, it was Nabokov's books in English that had laid its foundation: with the exception of the defamed *Lolita*, they were more accessible and in a certain sense safer for readers. *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *Laughter in the Dark* were already widely known in Moscow toward the end of the Khrushchev period.

Of the books in Russian, the first to circulate fairly widely underground was the Paris edition of *Priglashenie na kazn'* (*Invitation to a Beheading*), Editions Victor, 1966, a reprint of the 1938 edition. Already by the beginning of the seventies the Russian volumes reprinted by the American publisher "Ardis," including xerox copies, were no great rarity on the black market for books. Nabokov was one of the main authors in the *samizdat* stream of that time. In popularity he was just slightly behind Solzhenitsyn, Gumilev, and Mandelshtam, the three most prestigious authors (if we are to use the criteria of *samizdat*).

It is impossible of course to keep statistics on secret success, and one hardly ought to exaggerate it. With the sole exception of Solzhenitsyn, *samizdat* was read only by intellectuals. However, Nabokov really did penetrate into Russia. The fairly transparent allusions to his books that knowledgeable readers have found in Bitov, Iury Trifonov, and Vasily Aksenov point obliquely to this.

By degrees the ground for Nabokov's real return to his native land was being prepared. When it began, however, there at once developed an atmosphere of sensation: it would seem that the ban on his name, which had held for decades, had appeared too unquestionable. In the summer of 1986 the chess magazine *64* dared to publish a fragment from *The Defense* that was carefully offered up simply as a description of an outstanding game. This more than modest publication was perceived as the crumbling of the bases of Communist literary politics.

The consequence of the breakthrough was not hard to foresee: a flood of Nabokov publications gushed out. Nowhere in the world, even following the triumph of *Lolita*, had there been such a demand for Nabokov's books as there was in Russia nine years after his death. 1988 was a record-breaking year: attempting to out-strip one another, dozens of journals published Nabokov,

including such specialized ones as the Riga *Nauka i tekhnika* (*Science and Technology*), where the story "Terra Incognita" was published for the first time (no. 8, 1988), and the Moscow *Voprosy istorii estestvoznaniia i tekhniki*, (*Problems of the History of Natural Sciences and Technology*), which published "Pil'gram" ("The Aurelian"; no. 2, 1988). No matter what orientation they had, literary journals vied with one another to publish Nabokov. The avant-garde *Rodnik*, the conservative *Moskva*, the colorless *Ural*, and *Ogonek*, the politicized mouthpiece of *perestroika,* argued over the honor of considering Nabokov their author.

Soon books began to come out as well: the first as early as 1988, a volume containing *Mashen'ka* (*Mary*), *Zashchita Luzhina* (*The Defense*), *Priglashenie na kazn'* (*Invitation to a Beheading*), and fragments from *Drugie berega* (*Other Shores*, Nabokov's Russian variant of his English memoirs, *Conclusive Evidence* and *Speak, Memory*). A few more anthologies followed, with approximately the same selection of works, more often than not supplemented by short stories. Two editions should be singled out as the most significant for Nabokov's posthumous fate in Russia: the publication of *The Gift* in the journal *Ural* (nos. 3–6, 1989; a year later the translation of *Bend Sinister* appeared there as well) and the publication of *Lolita* as a supplement to the journal *Inostrannaia literatura* (1989). The last event was, of course, the most significant in the sense that there was no longer any basis for speaking of a taboo against Nabokov in Russia.

In some two or three years practically everything that Nabokov wrote in Russian was brought out. The exceptions were the most minimal: a frightening phrase in the story "The Admiralty Spire" about the "zelen[aia] zhizh[a] leninskikh mozgov" (translated as the "green pulp of Lenin's deceased brain"),[4] for example. A four-volume set of Nabokov's collected works, which came out as a supplement to *Ogonek* (1990) was a kind of summation, although *Lolita* and all of Nabokov's other English works were absent from it.

In general, things did not go smoothly with the English works, but together with the wave of interest in Nabokov's return among readers the difficulties began to be surmounted. Aleksandr Dolinin prepared an anthology that came out in 1991 and included *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, *Pnin*, and *Transparent Things* (*Pnin* in Gennady Barabtarlo's translation had been published even earlier in *Inostrannaia literatura*, no. 3, 1990, but a new translation was done for the anthology by B. Nosik). There are already Russian versions of several of the stories in *Nabokov's Dozen* that were written in English. So far, attempts to translate *Ada* have not been brought to a conclusion; only fragments have been published. *Pale Fire* exists only in Véra Nabokov's translation, which is not widely available in Russia. It appears that *Look at the Harlequins!* will appear in translation very soon.

The enthusiasm that this list might provoke must, however, be restrained at once. The quality of most of the editions named above, including the four-volume set, cannot withstand serious criticism. With a few exceptions,

especially Dolinin's publications, the texts are flawed, and there are numerous mistakes in the commentaries. As a rule, the introductory articles create a distorted picture of Nabokov.

This has already been noted by critics.[5] However, to this day the situation has not changed for the better, although objective reasons that could explain the deleted parts (but not justify them of course), especially those in *The Gift* and *Drugie berega*, no longer exist. The problem is that texts of the first Soviet editions that appeared in 1987–88 are being republished mechanically, and therefore the cuts are being reproduced as well, even though there is no longer any external reason for them.

The first Soviet editions happened to come out during a period when censorship was making concessions but still preserved the right to interfere when a text touched on such Communist objects of worship as the October Revolution or the figure of Lenin. Deletions along these lines were made in Nabokov's texts as well. Moreover, it was very common Soviet practice for publishers to make such concessions themselves as a means of protecting the work as a whole from the censor. Most of these cuts (usually not even marked by ellipses) are in *Drugie berega*: references to the "loathsome Leninist regime" ("merzostnyi leninskii rezhim") or the "era of bloodshed, concentration camps, and hostage-taking that began immediately after Lenin and his assistants seized power" ("era krovoprolitiia, kontsentratsionnykh lagerei i zalozhnichestva, nachavsheisia nemedlenno posle togo, chto Lenin i ego pomoshchniki zakhvatili vlast'") are all absent in the newest reprintings, even though these thoughts have now become commonplace.

This strange situation can be explained very simply. In today's book market in Russia, Nabokov is considered a saleable author. Making use of the atmosphere of sensation around him that has not yet dissipated, many of the new firms that have sprung up in the last few years have been republishing his books, even though they are incompetent in textology, and have no interest in it at all. They take texts from journal publications or from the hurriedly prepared 1990 collected works and repeat both the deletions and the mistakes. In terms of numbers of editions Nabokov has now far outstripped every Russian author of the twentieth century. However, a complete collection of at least his Russian works is a task for the distant future.

So far only a few preliminary steps have been made in this direction: a volume from the publishing house "Kniga" (1989, edited and with commentary by Dolinin and Roman Timenchik), and a Petersburg volume entitled *Krug* (1990, edited and with commentary by Nataliia Tolstaia). The first of these contains not only *Invitation to a Beheading* and seventeen short stories, but also a valuable selection of essays, reviews, and interviews, chiefly from the Russian émigré newspaper *Rul'* published in Berlin in the 1920s. The second is notable for its section of poems and dramas in verse. A full collection of Nabokov's plays is provided in *P'esy* (1990, edited by Ivan Tolstoi). Thorough

annotations for *The Gift* as well as three novels in English from the aforementioned 1991 volume are provided by Dolinin.

These are really the only editions available to readers in Russia who are seriously interested in Nabokov. All the others are the result of a vogue that is already fading, and on which the book industry tried to capitalize by putting Nabokov on the market in competition with Tarzan serials and the detective novels of Ross McDonald.

The feverish pace with which publishers brought out Nabokov's works in response to the demand for them had an effect even on the quality of the articles that accompanied these careless editions. Within a few years a whole literature about Nabokov had appeared in Russia, consisting, for the most part, of introductions and journal articles. Usually far from irreproachable in their command of facts, they did articulate, however, several clearly defined points of view about Nabokov that were almost incompatible with one another.

In publishing *Mary*, the journal *Literaturnaia ucheba* (no. 6, 1987) decided to allow both Nabokov's unqualified admirers and his uncompromising opponents to have their say. A strange collage resulted that could only distort the reception of Nabokov's text. In essence, the discussion was not about *Mary* but about whether Nabokov was really a Russian patriot, and whether it was possible to regard him as organically linked to the Russian tradition.

In fact, it is primarily around this point that arguments about Nabokov unfold, even though most often they reveal a poor knowledge of his legacy. Three approaches to his work gradually took shape: schematizing somewhat, one could call them the negative approach, the apologetic approach, and the approach that strives to balance pro and contra judgements. Each of them has its origins in the recent past when Nabokov was still a banned author and was, therefore, especially alluring to those who could not be satisfied by official Soviet literature.

In his own way Nabokov was important even for those who now reject him, but who during the time of the ban considered it their duty to keep up with him, if only to be prepared for the possibility of his coming to Russia and bringing his influence to bear on the Russian literary mentality—a pernicious influence, according to this view.

The frankest such position was formulated by Dmitry Urnov, one of the participants in the discussion about *Mary* in the journal *Literaturnaia ucheba*.[6] Urnov begins his article with a direct confession: "I have never been able to stand the prose of Vladimir Nabokov . . . antipathy has been my most persistent feeling toward him from the start." This reaction was provoked by the fact that all of Nabokov's work, according to Urnov, is a canonized, inflated phenomenon, an anti-literature, a sheer "deception" (p. 59). Urnov considers it superfluous to argue this view in any detail and limits himself to quotations from the Russian émigré writer and critic Georgy Ivanov that date from the 1930s. In his account, Urnov is silent about the context in which Ivanov's

judgements were expressed, and transforms Ivanov's evaluation into a kind of final truth about Nabokov, about whom all that remains to be said is that he was a "scathing self-satisfied philistine of a journalist" ("khlestkii poshliak-zhurnalist"), gifted with "great force, great imitative capabilities, and probably great self-confidence."

To these explosive attacks from émigré literary polemics Urnov adds only the statement that Nabokov was a successor to the decadent Symbolist writer Fedor Sologub, "but a successor to his worst, weakest side. . . . The class difference between Sologub and Nabokov is a great one, but spiritually they stand in that relation of lord to lackey that Dostoevsky revealed to be a characteristic phenomenon. They both date back to Dostoevsky's characters, most of all to the Underground Man; these are characters who have become emboldened to the point where they themselves have become their own masters, i.e., writers" (p. 60).

This kind of criticism, which it would be more accurate to call defamation, is usually built on the primitive method of equating a character with the author himself. So it is in Urnov's article: in Peredonov, the hero of Sologub's novel *The Petty Demon*, he discovers traits of Sologub; and he considers the cigarette butt that the hero of *Mary* throws into the mailbox to be a sign of Nabokov's own outlook as expressed in the novel. He writes that the "motif of the dirty trick [gadost'] done out of spite and gone unpunished" (p. 60) occupies a central place in Nabokov's work, and also that everything written by Nabokov was such a "dirty trick." The real issue here is not just Nabokov's personality as Urnov understands it, but that Nabokov had no real literary talent and tried to conceal it with "pranks" because he did not have a "sufficiently developed talent" (p. 61) for writing.

Therefore any one of Nabokov's books, according to Urnov, is always "invented [pridumana] with effort," and is the fruit "of long meditations about what else to arrange so as to amaze everyone" (p. 61). Such activities have no relationship to literature, and this same *Mary* is no more than "an elaborate, concocted bit of mere prettiness, and an uninventively concocted one at that" (p. 61). Against the background of the Russian tradition such "concoctions" are unforgivable. Urnov understands "tradition" in terms of so-called "organic" art in which literary devices are invisible and even somehow seem to be totally absent. Such "organicity" is a required attribute of literature, and since Nabokov does not have it, he is not, strictly speaking, a writer. What Nabokov has written is only an imitation of literature, and he himself is one of "those false literary idols" who are artificially created by the critics but who will not be long-lived (p. 59).

Urnov's case is somewhat extravagant, although not surprising for those who have some notion of the views of this critic, who spent many years attempting via the same methods to discredit the experiments of so-called "modernism," first of all Joyce and T.S. Eliot. Oleg Mikhailov, who wrote the first Soviet note on Nabokov and prepared the first Soviet volume of his works,

has fairly vague notions of Western literature and "modernism." But in his foreword to the Nabokov volume he repeats practically all of Urnov's tenets. For a long time Mikhailov was considered the principal Soviet specialist on émigré literature, and did quite a bit to restore Ivan Bunin, Ivan Shmelev, and others to their rightful places. It was natural that he should be the one to take on the task of introducing the Russian audience to Nabokov's world when the ban on Nabokov was lifted.

However, Mikhailov did not cope well with his role of guide, and revealed both an inadequate knowledge of Nabokov and an overt bias against him in the foreword that he reprinted several times. Aside from crude mistakes (suffice it to say that Montreux is called Nabokov's "estate," and the last name of the hero of *The Waltz Invention* is written with a lower-case letter, so that one is left to assume that the play is about the invention of a waltz), Mikhailov's article abounds in attacks on Nabokov as a writer who "haughtily rejected reality, saw in literary art for the most part a brilliant and 'useless' game of wit and imagination, and did not intend to hide it."[7] Borrowing his title from the Russian émigrée writer Zinaida Shakhovskaia, Mikhailov takes the metaphor of "a king without a kingdom" very straightforwardly: a synonym for it as it applies to Nabokov would be "a virtuoso without a literature." In Mikhailov's conception, Nabokov's prose does not contain anything except "hoaxes, a play of imaginary hallucinations . . . parodies . . . literary crossword puzzles" (p. 11). All this confirms Kuprin's later judgement of Nabokov (an extremely unjust one, of course): "a talented empty dancer [pustoplias]."

The arguments advanced by Mikhailov lead to such banalities as the inappropriateness of games at a time "when conflicts of enormous power shook the world" (p. 9), and to odd-sounding reproofs that for Nabokov literature was "first and foremost a problem of language" (p. 10), as if by its very nature it were obliged to be something different. This sort of criticism of Nabokov had already appeared in the first émigré reviews of his books. Half a century later all the same forms of invective were being repeated, even though they stem from an aesthetic that is unacceptable to Nabokov because it demands from the writer visible "service to society," "usefulness," and so forth. While not referring directly to this aesthetic, Mikhailov nonetheless is influenced by its demands when he formulates his basic thesis: except for *Mary* (and even that with reservations), Nabokov is alien to "the canonical tree trunk of our literature."

Awkwardly expressed, this formulation contains a rejection (familiar from Urnov's article) of everything that falls outside a narrowly interpreted Russian tradition. Having set Nabokov apart from the "canonical trunk," it is already easy to set him apart from literature as well. At best, he possesses "outstanding literary talent" (p. 14)—a compliment that does not modify at all either the general rejection of Nabokov or the obviously tendentious interpretations of his books.

It is not surprising that Mikhailov speaks extremely vaguely about the books themselves. The label "fantastic anti-utopia" (p. 12) is given in passing to *Invitation to a Beheading*, which does not fit at all under that heading. The only remark about *Mary* has to do with "maximal egoism" (p. 7) as a characteristic typical of Nabokov's protagonists in general. In Mikhailov's view, Nabokov cannot possess any system of ethical concepts and values: inasmuch as they are not expressed with the clarity of a sermon, they, as it were, do not exist at all. The aesthetic codes of Nabokov's prose, which in fact are not examined by Mikhailov, are nonetheless categorically rejected by him because they do not correspond to more traditional poetics. Because he doesn't accept Nabokov as a writer, Mikhailov cuts him off sharply from Russia, which "evoked in him no warmth at all" (p. 8). His further statements are downright fantastic: Mikhailov writes that Nabokov "transferred" his rejection of the Soviet regime "even to the Russians who had remained there," thus portraying them as brainless slaves. Even Nabokov's shift to English is called a return to the language that is his true native tongue (p. 5). It is as if Mikhailov does not know that Nabokov considered his forced rejection of the Russian language to be his personal tragedy, and was tormented by doubts about his ability to write in English.

The scorn for Nabokov's artistic language that shows through in the articles of those who would overthrow him can be explained. Mikhailov himself gave the reason: "Nabokov is the West's main stake in the fight for Russian literature and the most important Russian writer of the twentieth century from the point of view of the West" (p. 4). The crude style of this utterance is entirely in keeping with the spirit of ideological confrontation that for Mikhailov is not yet over. Nabokov was harmless as long as he was banned, but now a real possibility has arisen that he will influence Russian consciousness, to say nothing of literature. Critics who do not accept Nabokov try immediately to discredit him, sensing that he represents a threat to the "canonical trunk," which for these critics is marked by the names of Tolstoy (whom they read primitively) and his successors—up to and including Sholokhov. Perhaps Nabokov himself is not the main figure here after all; the argument is not with him but with all "noncanonical" Russian literature, of which Nabokov is a symbol.

In this sense Nabokov's apologists have much in common with his opponents. For both groups, Nabokov is important not so much as a creative personality but as a significant name in the unending exchange of fire over whether living sap still flows in the "canonical trunk."

Andrei Bitov, who wrote the foreword to the volume *Krug*, openly reveals a polemical purpose that turns Nabokov into a simple means of destroying a "canon" that had been enforced for decades, and into a method of justifying the repressed "noncanonical" aesthetic. "What kind of uninterrupted, unbroken Russian literature could we have had after Chekhov and Blok, after the Silver Age and the Symbolists? Nabokov is precisely a transplanted branch of this

hypothetical literature that grew through culture into civilization."[8] This entrance into civilization, that is, an attachment to the European type of artistic consciousness as it was expressed by Joyce, Proust, and Kafka, was not achieved either by Soviet literature, repressed as it was by a multitude of taboos, or by émigré literature, which "froze in eternal nostalgia" (p. 8). Nabokov is unique—specifically Nabokov, and not Sirin: "Moving backwards along the chain of Sirin's Russian novels, Nabokov gathers strength" (p. 14), duplicating, but also complicating, the situations of his Russian novels in his English books, right up to *Lolita*, which grew out of "The Enchanter" ("Volshebnik") and conquered the world. For Bitov, *Lolita* is Nabokov's main "meta-text" in which "everything was fulfilled" (p. 15), not only in the sense that Nabokov's talent reached its full realization, but also in a second, even more important sense: its final surmounting of literary stereotypes of both Soviet and émigré origins.

It is easy to see that in comparison to Urnov's and Mikhailov's articles, Bitov's is based on a reverse perspective: the same theses are interpreted in an opposite sense. For the former, Nabokov is a writer who is foreign to Russia and Russian literature; for Bitov, he is "not an émigré" at all, and *Drugie berega* (*Other Shores*) are "not Russia, but America" (p. 17). For the former, *Lolita* is obviously a "destruction of the gift," as Mikhailov expressed it;[9] for Bitov, it is the apotheosis of Nabokov's work. For the former, Nabokov preserves a minimal significance only as a creator of "fantastic anti-utopias" and so forth, although what is "fantastic" in this instance is the critical interpretation itself. Bitov completely refuses to read Nabokov under the aegis of "reproaches to history, society, or political systems," and sees in the motifs of violence and death only "the annoying, futile psychological obsessiveness in the life of an unnecessary, alienated person" (p. 11).

Bitov is a prose writer, and he constructed his essay by imitating Nabokov's narrative device in the short story that lent its title to the Petersburg collection *Krug* (*The Circle*), which begins "in the second place" and ends "in the first place." The ideas that Bitov expressed metaphorically in "The Clarity of Immortality" had been articulated a year earlier in an analytical piece by Viktor Erofeev, who was then almost unknown in Russia as a prose writer. Erofeev's article, "Nabokov's Russian Meta-Novel, or In Search of Paradise Lost" ("Russkii metaroman V. Nabokova, ili V poiskakh poteriannogo raia"), developed the thesis that Nabokov's loss of his parental home, which is preserved as a memory of a perfect world, is his main creative stimulus, and forms the proto-story-like basis of all that came out under Sirin's signature; moreover, this "super-novelistic unity" should be interpreted as a "meta-novel." In his foreword to the Moscow edition of *Lolita*, and in a review (written for, but not published by *The New York Review of Books*, and then printed in Russian in the newspaper *Moskovskie novosti*) of the first volume of Brian Boyd's biography,[10] Erofeev remained faithful to this reading of Nabokov. His views were justifiably challenged by Aleksandr Dolinin, who pointed

out that, following Khodasevich, "the life of the artist and the life of the device" could equally be acknowledged as Nabokov's "crucial theme"—or, following Véra Nabokov, so could the theme of the "otherworld" ("potustoronnost'").[11]

It is significant that the polemical attacks that Erofeev tried to veil in "Nabokov's Russian Meta-Novel" nearly dominate two of his other articles about Nabokov, and relegate to the background the task of interpreting Nabokov's texts themselves. In connection with *Lolita* Erofeev expresses a thought that is important for him: that Nabokov is absolutely essential as a writer because he resisted more than other Russian writers the kind of "literature that consciously stupefied the reader with the clarity and simplicity of its resolutions" and resisted "any established conceptions."[12] Like Sologub in *The Petty Demon*, Nabokov destroyed what Erofeev describes as "simplicity" and illusory "good order." Nabokov's "private theme of the loss of his paradise, of his motherland, was always elevated to an existential dimension, similar to what is found in the Western novel of the twentieth century—a loss of common ground between man and the world, a loss that turns into complete despair."[13]

Erofeev rejected Boyd's biography precisely because, in his view, it advanced a "myth about the ideal family man, optimist, and lover of life" at the same time that Nabokov's art, which reflects "complete despair," does not accord with such an ideal. Because Erofeev understands Nabokov in this way, it is natural that he would suspect that Boyd had artificially retouched his portrait.

But this literary quarrel is caused not only by different views of Nabokov. More often than not it is impossible to acknowledge the justice of Erofeev's claims because every episode in Boyd's biography is strictly documented. However, arguments such as these are not accidental. For Erofeev, as for others, Nabokov is also a kind of symbol of an embodiment of an aesthetic that is antagonistic to the enforced Soviet Russian principle of "art for life's sake." No matter how one views this principle, it is compromised by the rigid norms that it acquired in official Soviet interpretations. Having encountered a sentence in Boyd's introduction about how Nabokov believed in precisely this kind of art, Erofeev inevitably turns against a book written from this point of view. His attacks on Boyd are more often than not the result of misunderstanding, but these aberrations are unavoidable so long as Nabokov remains above all a bone of contention in today's debates, which are in essence not about the meaning of Nabokov, and not even about literature, but about liberation from ideological and aesthetic dogmas.

For this reason, much of what is written about Nabokov in Russia today relates not so much to Nabokov himself, but to the cultural, and at times even directly to the recent ideological, situation. Of course, as a result, interpretations of Nabokov as an artist suffer all the more since schemes of any kind prove to be especially unreliable when applied to him. Nonetheless it is more interesting to follow such polemics surrounding Nabokov than to acquaint

oneself with pondered, "objective" interpretations that in fact come down to a depersonalization of the writer. Interpreted through the system of categories that constitutes "canonical" Soviet aesthetics, Nabokov becomes almost indistinguishable from, for example, Aleksei Tolstoi before he turned into a Stalinist poet laureate.

A characteristic example of this is Aleksandr Muliarchik's article "Following Nabokov" ("Sleduia za Nabokovym"). The article prefaces the volume containing *Other Shores* and the stories of the Berlin period, and consists of a list of motifs that the critic considers to be most important for Nabokov. Among these appear "callous cordoned-off bondage" in which the protagonists "droop and wither" (p. 9), the denunciation of the "everyday, and also the psychological aspects of the existence of the Weimar philistine class" (p. 10), "a primordial trust in man, and the conviction that his decency and intelligence are natural and not exceptional" (p. 16), and so forth. In fact, everything in Muliarchik's article comes down to this kind of thematic guide. It is difficult for its reader to refrain from making comparisons with the description of the life of Sebastian Knight written by his secretary Goodman. In both cases, "magic words" such as "postwar unrest" and "postwar generation" become the key with which Goodman "opens every door"; and the result is "a thick flow of philosophical treacle."

Games, narrative masks, parody, travesty—all these categories that can be ignored by no one who would attempt to understand Nabokov's world are absent in Muliarchik. It would seem that the critic does not doubt that the narrator's words are direct expressions of the author. Only by means of such trustfulness can one explain the phrases that flicker in the article about "Nabokov's infectious love for life" that "defines one of the main intonations of his prose from the 1920s" (p. 11), about how "Nabokov rises up against discrediting the idea of social progress with lies and violence" (p. 11), about his "moral pathos" (p. 12), and much else in the same vein.

As a result, the whole perspective is distorted. Nabokov turns out to be a direct forerunner of French existentialism, which was, as we know, unacceptable to him, together with the entire literature of "great ideas." On the other hand, there are discovered in Nabokov denunciations of the Soviet "administrative-command system" and specifically of Stalin. The last passage, which treats "Tyrants Destroyed" ("Istreblenie tiranov") is especially revealing both for Muliarchik's approach and for much of what is being written about Nabokov today in Russia. The inertia of a methodology that needed without fail to point out "social problematics" in a literary work motivates the attempt to make Nabokov's texts relevant by all possible means. In them political hints are suddenly discovered that are topical for the contemporary situation in Russia, and that are even in direct harmony with it.

However, for those who sense the real nature of Nabokov's narratives, such harmony is nothing more than an acoustic hallucination.

In 1992 the first book about Nabokov written in Russia appeared—Nikolai Anastas'ev's monograph, *The Phenomenon of Nabokov* (*Fenomen Nabokova*). The author prudently stipulated that "any reading of Nabokov is but a version, and one should be prepared for the fact that it can be accepted or rejected" (p. 14). The book should indeed be perceived as a "version" that allows others as well.

In it, all of Nabokov's creative legacy is described, but not chronologically. The works are grouped thematically—a very risky step, which requires, for example, that a distinction be made between "satires and antiutopias," although, strictly speaking, Nabokov never wrote either a satire or an antiutopia. An entire chapter is dedicated to elucidating the question of whether Nabokov is a Russian writer or, after all, an American one. The expected answer—neither one, insofar as Nabokov's home is "everywhere and nowhere" (p. 105)—is backed up by quotes from *Strong Opinions*. However, it is hardly likely that any of Anastas'ev's readers will find this answer entirely convincing. But no matter, the author does not insist on his own point of view; he is only creating a version.

He is much more consistent in his refusal to examine Nabokov's books as metaliterature, and in his striving to reveal the social and political realities of the twentieth century that are behind them. On several occasions Anastas'ev polemicizes with D. Barton Johnson, acknowledging his observations about the structure of Nabokov's texts, but considering the approach itself to be wrong. In Anastas'ev's opinion, Nabokov cannot be interpreted by deciphering his artistic devices, such as anagrams, for example. Rather, it is important to understand Nabokov's "testimony about the times in which he had to live," and, moreover, to take into account the fact that he "in no way remained untouched by the influential artistic ideas and forms of his time" (p. 13).

Everything is subordinated to these tasks in Anastas'ev's book. If one agrees with the methodology he has chosen—a search for concrete historical echoes (Nabokov's books are "obviously the view of a man of the new century, with its threats, catastrophic shocks, and universal levelling of personality" [p. 91]), and comparisons with Western writers from Joyce to Borges—then one would have to acknowledge that the problem that Anastas'ev decided to address is solved. But the methodology itself is not always convincing. Bringing Nabokov out beyond the boundaries of meta-literature, Anastas'ev sometimes enters into a polemic not with the critics, but with Nabokov himself, even though this effect was what Anastas'ev desired least of all.

An unforeseen displacement has occurred, and it affects the character of the interpretations, especially of Nabokov's later books: for example, in reproofs for the excessive refinement of *Pale Fire* (p. 237), and in regrets for the fact that in *Ada* Nabokov is interested "only in linguistics, only in aesthetic matrices" (p. 260). One can explain the insistent but overly vague sociological interpretations of *Invitation to a Beheading* by this same distrust of the resources of metaliterature: "a general running wild . . . ugliness . . . theater of

the absurd in the literal sense" (p. 180). Similar remarks characterize the story "Cloud, Castle, Lake": "the atmosphere of intolerance toward every unconventional way of thinking has thickened, and the triumph of the stereotype has been portrayed . . . all that which is so characteristic of Nazi ideology" (p. 160).

Of course, one cannot blindly trust every declaration by Nabokov, who resolutely swept aside this sort of concretizing reading. And still the words of Charles Kinbote in *Pale Fire*, who considers it a fundamental fact that reality can be neither the subject nor the object of art, which creates its own world, are amply supported by all that Nabokov wrote, beginning with *Mary*. And this peculiarly Nabokovian world should be evaluated only according to the architectural laws that are established within it.

For Russian interpreters of Nabokov this is a difficult thing, both because of the unfamiliarity of Nabokov's architecture, and because it is impossible to overcome in one attempt an approach that has been dominant for decades—when even lyric poetry was perceived for the most part as a "testimony of the times." All the difficulties begotten by these reasons are palpable in Anastas'ev's book. Nevertheless, the book is important today amidst the dismayed bewilderment that, for the most part, Nabokov provokes in the ordinary Russian reader. From the point of view of documentation, Anastas'ev's book is relatively exact (although the renaming of "Zoorlandiia" as "Zurlandiia" [p. 238] and James Laughlin of "New Directions" as James Longlin [p. 265] are distressing). On the whole it is quite objective from the point of view of interpretation as well. And it is definitely friendly toward Nabokov. Against the background of what Urnov and Mikhailov wrote about him, this is no small achievement.

Almost no one who has written about Nabokov has resisted the temptation of quoting Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev from *The Gift* when he says that it is easier for him to live outside Russia than it is for others because he will return there sooner or later, either in his books or at least in a translator's footnote. It is clear that this happened not after centuries, as Nabokov's character suggested, and in much more impressive forms. We have had the opportunity to convince ourselves that rejoicing over this was premature: it will still be a while before Nabokov is read and understood really deeply in Russia. Even today his Russian reader cannot see him clearly; it is all the same "strobe-effect spin of spokes," although the necessity for going "incognito" has fallen away. Someday even his obscurity will disperse, which in the meantime gives rise to more confusion about Nabokov's uniqueness than to an understanding of it.

Aleksei Zverev
Translated from the Russian by Anna K. Primrose

NOTES

1. *Kratkaia literaturnaia entsiklopediia.* Vol. 5. Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1965.
2. *Nash sovremennik,* no. 1, 1974.
3. Bitov, "Iasnost' bessmertiia," 17.
4. Nabokov, *Vesna v fial'te,* 227, *Tyrants Destroyed,* 134.
5. S. Deliulin wrote about the nature of the omissions in Soviet reprints of *Drugie berega,* as did I. Tolstoi in his article "Zubastaia zhenshchina, ili Nabokov posle psikhoza," which is a critical survey of Nabokov editions in the Soviet Union.
6. Urnov, "Priglashenie na sud." Subsequent page references are given in the text.
7. Mikhailov, "Korol' bez korolevstva." Subsequent page references are given in the text.
8. Quotations from Bitov's article are cited from the one-volume Nabokov collection *Krug.* Page numbers are given in the text.
9. An article of Mikhailov's that accompanied the publication of *The Defense* actually was entitled "Razrushenie dara" ("The Destruction of the Gift").
10. *Moskovskie novosti,* March 12, 1992.
11. Dolinin, "Posle Sirina," p. 11.
12. Erofeev, "Lolita, ili Zapovednyi oazis liubvi," p. 6.
13. Ibid., p. 8.

LOLITA

The most "American"—and most notorious—of Nabokov's novels arrived on these shores from France. After five different American publishers rejected the manuscript, the author's third novel in English was brought out by the Olympia Press in Paris in 1955.[1] *Lolita*'s checkered publishing history afforded a poor debut for a novel that Alfred Appel, Jr. has aptly called "a remarkable imaginative feat." Today most readers of American literature would join Appel in lauding the achievement of this Russian-born "European émigré," who in *Lolita* "re-created America so brilliantly, and in so doing . . . [became] an American writer" (*AnL* xl). In the mid-1950s, on the other hand, *Lolita*'s volatile subject matter—the sexual passion of a middle-aged European for a twelve-year-old American girl—set off a flurry of scandal and debate about the novel's alleged obscenity.

The controversy that began in France and England eventually caught the attention of American critics and writers, who read the book and pressed for its publication here. Finally, three years after its appearance in France, *Lolita* was published on this side of the Atlantic in 1958.[2]

Because its theme "was so distant, so remote from [his] own emotional life," said Nabokov, *Lolita* was the "most difficult" of his books to write and, at the same time, remained "a special favorite" of his (*SO* 15). Largely because of its theme, the novel enjoyed a *succès de scandal,* becoming a national bestseller for over a year. Four years after the first American edition of *Lolita* appeared,

a movie version—loosely based on the screenplay Nabokov wrote at the behest of Stanley Kubrick, its director—drew a wide audience. *Lolita* soon earned Nabokov enough money to give up his professorship at Cornell University and devote himself entirely to writing. In subsequent years the novel inspired, with decidedly less success, an abortive musical version (1971) by Alan Jay Lerner and John Barry, which did not survive its trial run, and a play by Edward Albee that opened in New York in March of 1981. Despite its illustrious cast, which included Ian Richardson and Donald Sutherland, the play closed the same month.

Evincing none of the novel's subtlety of style or vision, Albee's playscript, published in 1984, helps to suggest why so many careless (or salacious) readers of *Lolita* mistook the novel for obscenity. It is as though the playwright, interested in little more than the novel's shocking subject, had decided to animate *his* characters with the one-dimensional psychology and rudimentary lust falsely attributed to the novel's protagonist and author. Although purporting to plumb the Unconscious depths of "the American dream—if we only admitted it," Albee begins, paradoxically, by emptying the characters of emotional and moral complexity.[3] Near the opening of the play, for example, Humbert appears on stage with a life-size doll that he proceeds to manipulate, in graphic demonstration of his sexual prowess as a young boy.[4] With similar heavy-handedness, Albee reduces each of the central characters to a mechanical, though highly sexed, puppet or doll—just as he reduces Nabokov's theme of romantic longing to a vulgar simulacrum. So crude, unimaginative and devoid of psychological nuance are Lolita, her mother, and Humbert that their ultimate degradation seems inevitable—producing no sense, as the novel does so poignantly, of human loss. Albee's play is conceived in a spirit and form wholly resistant to the vision of human reality and consciousness that informs Nabokov's novel.

None of *Lolita*'s other spin-offs inverts so dramatically—or perversely—the novel's style and thematic structure. Yet although Kubrick's 1962 film achieved considerably greater artistic as well as commercial success, the finished product testifies, once more, to the difficulties of trying to turn an intricately wrought universe of words into a winning combination of visual images and dramatic actions. Even Nabokov's own attempt at metamorphosis, the screenplay that Kubrick invited the author to write but then largely ignored, serves to highlight the greater intensity and dramatic effects of the original novel. The same holds true of a much earlier work related to *Lolita*'s development, a story Nabokov composed in Russian in 1939; "Volshebnik" was not, in fact, published until 1986, when it appeared in English translation under the title of *The Enchanter*.[5] Like the novel's later satellites, *The Enchanter* merits critical attention largely because of the light it sheds on the artistry of *Lolita*. Focusing on the stylistic and thematic complexities of Nabokov's masterful novel, this essay will take up, in due course, *Lolita*'s artistic relationship to the above mentioned story, screenplay, and film.

Not long after its publication in America, the debate over *Lolita*'s rightful status as literature or pornography was settled in Nabokov's favor by prominent literary critics, editors and the courts. By the time that Alfred Appel, Jr.'s, edition of *The Annotated Lolita* appeared in 1970 (revised edition 1991)—augmenting the three-hundred-page novel with nearly as many pages of notes, commentary, and critical analysis—Appel could say: "Many readers are [now] more troubled by Humbert Humbert's use of language and lore than by his abuse of Lolita and the law. Their sense of intimidation is not unwarranted; *Lolita* is surely the most allusive and linguistically playful novel in English since *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939)" (*AnL* [1991] xi). Appel's punning dismissal of the moral issues that galvanized the novel's first readers signals the approach that many critical studies began to adopt after his ground-breaking, two-part essay paved the way (see Appel, 1967).

Once the literary merit of *Lolita* had been recognized, many scholars brushed aside the moral and psychological elements of the novel—eager, instead, to solve *Lolita*'s linguistic puzzles and to limn the facets of its cunningly wrought design. The growth of interest in linguistic and narrative theory during the past two decades may have further fueled this somewhat blinkered approach to Nabokov's complex fiction. The best studies have shown how a close examination of the novel's linguistic structure does not obviate but rather enhances an understanding of the human dimensions of Nabokov's art (see, for example, Tamir-Ghez, 1984).

On one central issue virtually all of Nabokov's commentators agree. Both the style and structure of *Lolita* announce its status as a work of art. From the reflexive patterns lurking in the patently artificial names—Humbert Humbert, Gaston Godin, John Ray, Jr. (J.R., Jr.)—to the thoroughly implausible coincidences that signal the operation of fate in their lives, the landscape of fiction calls attention to its origins.[6] In contrast to novels adhering to the conventions of traditional realism, Nabokov's declared works of artifice do not pretend to offer readers an unmediated representation, or seemingly objective picture, of reality. Yet the artifice of Nabokov's novels does not imply, as many initially assumed, the author's disdain for human beings or for creating convincing characters within the frame of his fiction. To the contrary, the artifice of art operates as Nabokov's model of the universe. The world human beings perceive and call "reality"—a word that in Nabokov's view must always be accompanied by quotation marks—is known only through their perceptual reconstructions of it (*SO* 154). Insofar as human consciousness itself is creative, each individual is engaged in the essentially *artistic* process of creating or recreating, out of the raw materials or elements of existence, the particular shape and meaning of the world he inhabits.

The most recent development in Nabokov studies further underscores the essential analogies between word and world, text and universe that Nabokov's art explores. As the novelist's widow suggested to readers in 1979, hints of a transcendent and timeless order of existence may be gleaned in the prisms of

Nabokov's reflected worlds.[7] Such glimpses of a "hereafter" or "beyond" in Nabokov's artifice have begun, therefore, to foster radically new interpretations of the self-referential devices and parodic structures that comprise it (see, for example, Alexandrov, 1991). Critics have long noted the fact that Nabokov, like his invented author in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, uses parody as the "springboard for leaping into the highest region of serious emotion" (*RLSK* 89). What they are now beginning to recognize is the sheer distance scaled by Nabokov's imagination. At the extreme verge of consciousness and art—the "highest region" to which thought, feeling, and perception aspire—mortals may even experience, his fiction suggests, the faint apprehension of a world beyond their own: an intimation of immortality (see Alexandrov, 1991; Pifer, 1989; and Rowe, 1981).

Whether or not the reader is prepared to recognize the transcendental reach of Nabokov's artifice, he cannot ignore the parody that informs its style and structure.[8] Thomas Frosch locates the operation of parody in the novel's imitation of or "confrontation with a prior text or type of text." "Parodists," he adds, "use a voice different from their own in such a way as to call attention to themselves. . . . This sense of displaced recognition, this incongruous simultaneity of closeness and distance, is a primary source of the delight and humor of parody."[9] Because parodic effects occur on so many levels in *Lolita*, the novel provides an excellent opportunity to examine the ultimate implications of Nabokov's playful verbal stratagems.

To begin with, the rapid alternations in Humbert's narrative voice—incongruously shifting from the high style of pathos to the low style of farce, from rapturous evocation to mocking self-denigration—create an immediate impression, on the reader's part, of simultaneous closeness to and distance from the narrator. Much of the novel's comedy, moreover, derives from the incongruous picture of the Parisian-born European set adrift in the provincial backwaters of America. When, in a fit of heartburn, Humbert declares, "they call those fries 'French,' *grand Dieu*!," or balks at the "cottage-cheese-crested salads" dotting every diner across the land, America's national talent for tastelessness becomes the object of satire as well (*Lo* 129, 148). Nabokov, Appel observes, makes sport of nearly every aspect of American popular culture of the 1950s: "American songs, ads, movies, magazines, brand names, tourist attractions, summer camps, Dude Ranches, hotels, and motels, as well as the Good-Housekeeping Syndrome . . . and the cant of progressive educationist[s]" (*AnL xlviii*).

A true believer in this consumer heaven, Lolita displays innocent faith in the advice proffered by her Teen magazines and "a kind of celestial trust" in the latest billboard slogans (148). Facing each other across an abyss of years and cultural difference, she and Humbert act out a grotesque parody of the generation-gap plaguing real fathers and children in twentieth-century America. One of the more poignant effects of the novel is that despite the relentless regularity with which Humbert thrusts himself, literally and figuratively, upon

his "nymphet" during their two-year cohabitation, he and Lolita remain virtual strangers—distant, mutually uncomprehending, and painfully isolated. Another striking effect arises from Humbert's painful admission—one that sheds an altogether different light on the American landscape through which he travels—that his corruption of the child constitutes a crime against pristine nature and its boundless beauty. "We had been everywhere," he says of his cross-country trek with Lolita. "We had really seen nothing. And I catch myself thinking today that our long journey had only defiled with a sinuous trail of slime [this] lovely, trustful, dreamy, enormous country" (175–76). Just as Humbert's narrative account of his life with Lolita brings recognition of the "poor, bruised child" he exploited, so his voyage into the past brings new discovery of America (284).[10] In each case, the metaphor of a *terra incognita*, or unknown country, attests to his former blindness.

It is a mark of Nabokov's skill, and of the resources of parody as a novelistic device, that his readers are simultaneously amused by the novel's comic exposure of the banalities of American life and moved by the poignant isolation of its characters. Adding to this "incongruous simultaneity of closeness and distance," as Frosch puts it, is another significant effect: the readers' awareness that the world they are witnessing has taken shape in the author's imagination, that these characters and events belong to the artifice of Nabokov's invented universe—in this case, his "invented America."[11] *Lolita*, in this sense, comprises nothing more or less than a dazzling "game" of words—and worlds (see Alter, 1975; Appel, 1967, 1991; and Karlinsky, "Nabokov's Russian Games"). Viewed from this perspective, the serene and lovely landscape that Humbert and Lolita traverse in their lengthy car trek across America takes on the two-dimensional surface of a "gameboard" (*AnL* lxiv-lxv). Moving his characters across this board, Nabokov—a noted chessplayer and composer of chess problems—plants both clues and false leads to keep his readers on their mental toes and to trip up the inattentive.

With the introduction of Clare Quilty into the story—Quilty the playwright and pedophile who turns out to be Humbert's secret rival—the landscape of Nabokov's "invented America" takes on a surreal quality. Shadowed by this mysterious figure across the gameboard of intersecting highways and byways, Humbert flees with Lolita, not knowing whether he is being pursued by the law, in the guise of some "Detective Trapp," or by an avenging Double. In recounting his tale to the reader, Humbert withholds Quilty's identity until the novel's close. Driving home the fact that each reader is also a participant in this novelistic game of detection, Humbert slyly refuses to report the name he hears from Lolita's lips near the end of the story: "'Do you really want to know who it was? [she says to Humbert.] Well it was—' And softly, confidentially, . . . she emitted . . . the name that the astute reader has guessed long ago" (271–72). Humbert is aware, of course, that even the most alert reader has probably failed, on first reading, to detect the clues embedded

in his narrative. The pieces of the puzzle do not fall into place until later—at least until Lolita utters Quilty's nickname, "Cue," at the end of the scene (279).

This final meeting between Humbert and Lolita, to which she has summoned him three years after her disappearance, demonstrates the way in which parody contributes to the game that each of Nabokov's novels sets in motion. Peppered with allusions to Prosper Mérimée's *Carmen*—the melodramatic tale of jealous love that inspired Bizet's famous opera—Humbert's narration provokes the reader's conventional expectations only to overturn them. As he toys with the gun in his pocket and mentally addresses her as his "Carmen" or "Carmencita," Humbert implores Lolita, now Mrs. Richard Schiller—seventeen and pregnant with her husband's child—to come away with him. Playing upon the reader's fear that, like José in Mérimée's novella, jealous Humbert will kill Lolita when she refuses, he says, "Then I pulled out my automatic—I mean, this is the kind of fool thing a reader might suppose I did. It never even occurred to me to do it" (278–80).

If Nabokov's readers must concede the literary game to the author—largely because *Lolita* does not proceed according to the customary laws governing conventional novels—they cannot say they lacked fair warning. From the very opening of the novel—even before Humbert's narration begins—Nabokov alerts us to the game between author and reader that is about to take place. Serving as the Foreword to Humbert's tale is a deceptively authoritative-looking statement, signed by a putative psychotherapist named "John Ray, Jr., Ph.D.," which quickly reveals itself to be another feint or stratagem on the author's part. In his Afterword to the novel, "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*," Nabokov admits that "suave John Ray" is his own "impersonation" of an alleged psychiatric authority (311). Ray is named, however, after a seventeenth-century English naturalist (John Ray, 1627–1705) whose concept of insect metamorphosis hints at his intellectual kinship with the novel's author.[12] Nabokov, donning a mask that he gradually lets slip, parodies the devices novelists have employed for centuries to disguise their fictions as "true" accounts. From Defoe to Dostoevsky, the novel's history is replete with bogus documents—letters, diaries, wills, and contracts—placed in the hands of putatively "real" individuals to gain the reader's credibility.

Appearing to encourage this line of development, John Ray, Jr., tells Nabokov's readers that the author of the pages they are about to read "died in legal captivity, of coronary thrombosis, on November 16, 1952, a few days before his trial was scheduled to start." Because of his clinical interest in "certain morbid states and perversions," Ray adds, he has been entrusted with the dead man's diary (3). Numerous details in the Foreword, on the other hand, undermine its ostensible bid for authenticity—drawing attention, instead, to the patently invented status of both "John Ray, Jr." and the other "real" persons to whom he alludes. They include a female biographer, one "Vivian Darkbloom," whose name is an obvious anagram of Vladimir Nabokov, the author presiding over this invented universe (4).

In the midst of developing his clinical guise, moreover, Ray abruptly abandons his professional stance and didactic tone to declare "how magically" the narrator's "singing violin can conjure up a tendresse, a compassion for Lolita that makes us entranced with the book while abhorring its author!" (5). Already at the outset Nabokov alerts his readers to the novel's status as art. It is not as a psychiatric case history but as a work of art that *Lolita* must be read and appraised. What readers will find in its pages is no "general lesson" but the plangent music of the narrator's language—creating a story that will entrance them but at the same time guard against their unthinking identification with the teller.

When, in the opening section of his narrative, Humbert Humbert says, "You can always count on a murderer for a fancy prose style," Nabokov calls further attention to the medium rather than the message of the text. Aware of the deceptive as well as evocative power of his verbal music, Humbert gives his audience fair warning to maintain their critical distance. Guilty of murder, eager to confess, he nonetheless acknowledges that all the eloquent turns and comic twists of his elaborate prose help him to disguise as well as describe, conceal as well as reveal, the details of his story. All art, like that "good cheat" nature, is deceptive, Nabokov maintains (*SO* 11).[13] But Humbert's language is especially duplicitous because he figures prominently among those he would deceive. Only gradually, and with great difficulty, can he bear to reveal the truth of the tale he has to tell: that at the age of thirty-seven he developed a passion for a twelve-year-old child whom he subsequently begged and bribed, cajoled and tyrannized into sexual cohabitation—until, at the age of fourteen, she succeeded in escaping him.

Still, the truth of experience is never as naked as the popular saying would have. True, Humbert is a pervert; yet his passion for Lolita originates not in some clinical or chemical disorder but in the depths of his imagination. His "nympholepsy," Frosch observes, "is aesthetic as well as sexual; the nymphet in the child is perceived by the mind."[14] Frosch's statement would even more accurately reflect Nabokov's approach to reality if it were revised to read "sexual as well as aesthetic." For as Humbert says in a passage that echoes Nabokov's well-known disdain for Freud, "It is not the artistic aptitudes that are secondary sexual characters as some shams and shamans have said; it is the other way around: sex is but the ancilla of art" (259). Nabokov, who locates the operations of consciousness at the very center of human reality, does not merely qualify but openly rejects Freud's notion of art as sexual sublimation. Just as truth is never naked—for it is apprehended only through the consciousness that clothes and colors it—so the fantasized nymphet, rather than the naked child, is the primary source and object of Humbert's desire. Recalling the night that he enjoyed Lolita's naked body for the first time, Humbert underscores the distinction: "Anybody can imagine those elements of animality. A greater endeavor lures me on: to fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets" (134).

Difficult as it might be to fix, or capture in words, the nymphet's elusive magic, Humbert's aesthetic aim exists within the realm of the possible—as his verbal evocations of this magical creature eloquently demonstrate. Humbert's desire to possess the nymphet *in person* is, however, another story: a story that belongs to the *impossible* realm of romance. Here Humbert's true precursors are not the pedophiles of psychiatric case history but those romantic dreamers—from Emma Bovary to Edgar Poe, Don Quixote to Jay Gatsby—who in countless novels and poems suffer the fatal affliction of infinite longing, transcendent desire. Romantic love, as Poe wrote in a poem, "Annabel Lee," whose lines resonate throughout Humbert's narration, aspires to "a love that [is] more than love."[15]

The parody of romantic themes in *Lolita* operates on so many levels, tapping the resources not only of English Romanticism but of its Russian and French counterparts, that only a few of the more predominant motifs can be treated here. Humbert's evocation of the nymphet combines, for example, the nymph or water sprite of Russian folklore—the *rusalka*—with the "neznakomka," or alluring "stranger," in the neoromantic poems of the Russian Symbolist, Aleksandr Blok.[16] As Denis de Rougemont suggests, *Lolita* can also be read as a modern version of the medieval Tristan myth, with the nymphet serving as "the inaccessible object" of forbidden passion and "infinite desire": "The possession of this inaccessible object," which for the lover embodies "an absolute preferable to life itself," constitutes both his "ecstasy, 'the supreme joy,'" and his death.[17]

Like so many romantic dreamers before him, Humbert is captivated by an ideal image or vision—one infinitely more real to him than the pre-adolescent American kid named Dolores Haze whom he deprives of a childhood. Just as Fitzgerald's readers, in *The Great Gatsby*, come to recognize the enormous disparity between Gatsby's rapturous vision of Daisy Buchanan and the rather ordinary young woman others perceive—so Nabokov's readers are called upon to distinguish between the visions that Humbert has stored up in *his* "ghostly heart" and the victimized child who pales to insignificance under his voracious gaze. As Nick Carraway says of Gatsby, "the colossal vitality of his illusion went beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion."[18]

The narrator of his own tale of creative (and destructive) passion, Humbert states the case even more forcefully. Describing how he achieved, surreptitiously and onanistically, his first sexual ecstasy with Lolita—as the child, munching an apple, lay sprawled on his lap—Humbert admits that "Lolita had been safely solipsized" (60). "What I had madly possessed," he goes on to say, "was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita—perhaps, more real than Lolita; . . . and having no will, no consciousness—indeed, no life of her own" (p. 62). Nabokov's later Russian translation of the novel, Alexandrov points out, "makes the point even more bluntly." Instead of the sentence, "Lolita had been safely solipsized," the Russian version reads:

"Real'nost' Lolity byla blagopoluchno otmenena," which in English means, "Lolita's reality was successfully canceled."[19]

The power and poison of romantic love stem from the paradoxical fact that the ideal vision is wedded to impossibility. It is Humbert's romantic longing for the unattainable, for ideal perfection—what he calls "the great rosegray never-to-be-had"—that fires his imagination and fuels his desire for nymphet beauty. As he admits to the reader, "it may well be that the very attraction immaturity has for me lies not so much in the limpidity of pure young forbidden fairy child beauty as in the security of a situation where infinite perfections"—perfections, that is, that can only be dreamed of, imagined—"fill the gap between the little given and the great promised." To retain its aura and identity, the vision must remain "out of reach, with no possibility of attainment to spoil it" (264).

The unattainable nature of Humbert's quest is revealed, early on, by the "time terms" he substitutes for "spatial ones" when describing nymphet beauty. Among young girls between the ages of nine and fourteen, the bewitched nympholept discovers those rare few whose true nature, he says, "is not human but nymphic (that is, demoniac)." Humbert adds, "I would have the reader see 'nine' and 'fourteen' as the boundaries—the mirrory beaches and rosy rocks—of an enchanted island haunted by those nymphets of mine and surrounded by a vast, misty sea." The world where "Lolita plays with her likes" is, he makes clear, not a geographical location but an "intangible island of entranced time." In this mental Arcadia, the temporal laws governing mortal existence are magically suspended by the power of imagination. "You have to be an artist and a madman," Humbert admits, "to discern at once, by ineffable signs . . . the little deadly demon among the wholesome children" (16–17). Clearly, it is his own fantasizing imagination that works the demonic magic he ascribes to the nymphet.

In ardent pursuit of Arcadia, Humbert can only possess, in the physical or sexual sense, the *body* of a child he has imaginatively transformed into the figment of his dreaming mind. That he first possesses that body in The Enchanted Hunters hotel is itself apt; for Humbert is the enchanted hunter of his own romantic tale. In thrall to his mythicizing imagination, he is at once captor and captive, predator and prey. After Humbert's first, fateful night with Lolita in the hotel, "every nerve" of this enchanted hunter is alive "with the feel of her body—the body of some immortal daemon disguised as a female child" (139). Needless to say, Humbert's appeal to the elements of old romance—to the uncanny power of mythic beings disguised as mortals—is not to be taken literally.[20] Even as a metaphoric expression of ardent desire, his rhetoric gives him away. Turning on the word "disguised," Humbert's description of the nymphet reflects his own desperate efforts at disguise. Not only must he conceal his reprehensible conduct from the hotel desk clerks and other guests; he also hides from the child, until *after* he has possessed her, the fact that her

mother has died in a car accident. Hardly an "immortal daemon" in mortal guise, twelve-year-old Dolores Haze is a hapless and helpless orphan.

Humbert's rhetorical attempts at self-justification are never more unconvincing than when, having usurped Lolita's identity as a child, he claims the child's innocence for himself: "Humbert Humbert tried hard to be good. Really and truly, he did. He had the utmost respect for ordinary children, with their purity and vulnerability, and under no circumstances would he have interfered with the innocence of a child, if there was the least risk of a row. But how his heart beat when, among the innocent throng, he espied a demon child" (19–20). The distinction Humbert draws between the demonic nymphet, who bewitches him, and the innocent child, whose purity and vulnerability he honors, instantly collapses as he inadvertently admits that he would interfere with the child's innocence *only* if he could avoid a row!

As the foregoing passages demonstrate, the shifting tones and undertones of Humbert's first-person narration play a central role in achieving the novel's complex thematic effects. It is Humbert's allusive, playful, and parodic language that establishes his dual role as enchanter and enchanted. Through the various guises and disguises of his language Humbert gradually arrives at the painful recognition that, prey to his own ardent imagination, he was the predator who captured Lolita and destroyed her childhood. The dual nature of Humbert's awareness, rather than the romantic Double motif parodied throughout the novel, provides much of the novel's moral and psychological resonance.[21]

Imparting that dual awareness to the reader, *Lolita*'s structural parodies and literary reflexivity also sustain a crucial ironic distance between the narrator's romantic obsession and the reader's larger perspective. Difficult enough to bring off in the medium of language—especially when the clever protagonist takes charge of his own story—the distinction between a character's point of view and the reader's becomes even more elusive in film, where the camera's ubiquitous authority tends to undermine the psychological effects of point of view. In the screenplay he wrote at the behest of Stanley Kubrick, Nabokov attempts to alert as well as to distance the audience by calling attention to Humbert's romantic obsession. He peppers the script with scenes that depict Humbert in the process of reading, reciting, and lecturing on romantic poetry. While Kubrick employs some of these allusive gestures in his 1962 movie, their effect is oddly lukewarm—failing to reveal the intensity of Humbert's obsession. Beneath the cultivated accent and bookish demeanor that reduce Lolita's mother to abject worship, surprisingly little of Humbert's character comes through. Part of the problem is that Kubrick transfers much of Humbert's wit, energy and verbal inventiveness to the onscreen persona of Clare Quilty. Taking full advantage of Peter Sellers' comic genius and talent for improvisation, Kubrick drastically hollows out the film's main character. With few clever lines to break the monotony of his public reserve or his private

quarrels with Lolita, James Mason performs the thankless task of playing a desperate but rather dull man.

It is hardly surprising that Kubrick, no matter how gifted a director, does not succeed in translating the contradictions and complexities of the romantic's private universe onto the public screen. Somewhat more surprising is the way that the director's efforts to make Humbert a more sympathetic, even pathetic, character—by transferring most of his predatory cunning and duplicity to the playwright Quilty—oddly backfires. By reducing the magnitude of Humbert's crime in the viewer's eyes (as well as in Humbert's own), Kubrick paradoxically creates a work that, though clever and at times hilarious, lacks emotional depth and range. The fact that Sue Lyon, decked out in bright lipstick, tight jeans and spiky heels, looks far too grownup for her character's age does not help, either. Lyon plays the tough adolescent so convincingly that what Nabokov called "my little girl's heartrending fate" is often dismissed or forgotten (*SO* 25). The only real victim in Kubrick's version of *Lolita* is pathetic Humbert. Consistent with this emphasis, the film omits a crucial element in both the novel's design and Nabokov's published screenplay: the revelation that shortly after Humbert's fatal heart attack in prison, Lolita dies "in childbed," after "giving birth to a stillborn girl" (*Lo* 4; *Lolita: A Screenplay*, p. 212). Spared any knowledge of Lolita's grim fate, Kubrick's audience gleans only a faint note of the poignant theme so central to the novel: the theme of ruined life, abortive childhood, which culminates in the dramatic image of Lolita's stillborn baby.

Interestingly, Nabokov's early study of nymphet-obsession, "The Enchanter," also suffers from lack of emotional range and depth. Relayed by a third-person narrator, the protagonist's obsession is vividly rendered in what Nabokov, years later, called a "precise and lucid" style.[22] Yet part of the story's stylistic precision arises from the narrator's faithful tracking of the nympholept's single-minded determination—up to the moment when, his wicked secret discovered, the Enchanter dashes into the street to meet his death. Until an oncoming truck tears through "the film of [his] life," the Enchanter remains utterly enchanted, utterly in thrall to his monomania (p. 95). He suffers none of the torment, guilt, and remorse kindled in Humbert's consciousness by the act of memory and narration.

Nabokov, by his own report, did not try to publish the Russian version of "The Enchanter" when it was completed. As he says in the afterword to *Lolita*, "I was not pleased with the thing" (312). His displeasure, he later told Appel, arose from the fact that "the little girl wasn't alive. She hardly spoke. Little by little [while writing *Lolita*] I managed to give her some semblance of reality" (*AnL* lvi). Choosing to narrate his novel in the first person, Nabokov had to create a character whose voice and vision were sufficiently complex, psychologically and morally, to render the reality of the child eclipsed by her lover's passion. Within the frame of the artifice, in other words, Lolita's vital existence—as a child rather than a nymphet—depends upon Humbert's capacity to penetrate the bars of his own obsession. No matter how abortive

or belated its articulation, the operation of conscience in Humbert's consciousness establishes the crucial difference not only between his character and the protagonist of "The Enchanter," but between the minor key of the early story and the major resonances of *Lolita*. Only in the latter work does the enchanter mournfully discover the terrible nature of his magic and unmask himself before those he has sought, with his duplicitous language, to enchant.

Gradually, as he recounts his relationship with Lolita after he has lost her, Humbert allows certain "smothered memories" to come to light, memories that define the difference between his imaginative creation, the nymphet Lolita, and the pre-adolescent kid, Dolly Haze (284). Much earlier, however, even when he appears most enthralled by the recollected delights of nymphet-love, he signals the "grotesque gap," as Gladys Clifton puts it, that separates the fantasized nymphet from the isolated child. Thus, as Clifton notes, even when Humbert relates his "sexual transport" at having first possessed Lolita in The Enchanted Hunters hotel, the passage describing his raptures ends with a disturbing evocation of the child's pain.[23] The passage in question draws to a close as Humbert invokes the "last throb" of his sexual delirium: "a fire opal dissolving within a ripple-ringed pool, a last throb, a last dab of color, stinging red, smarting pink, a sigh, a wincing child" (134–35). The unsettling incongruity between Humbert's fierce appetite and the child's fragile body opens a moral abyss that, by Humbert's own account, gradually transforms his private paradise into a living hell.

The romantic nature of Humbert's obsession gives rise to the literary formulae parodied throughout the novel. Interestingly, however, his latent capacity to transcend his solipsistic vision is expressed not by abandoning romantic forms and figures but by turning them, so to speak, on their heads. In one well-known passage near the end of the novel, for example, Humbert recalls a time when, overhearing Lolita talking to a schoolfriend about death, he first realized how little he knew about his nymphet. "And it struck me," he says, "that I simply did not know a thing about my darling's mind and that quite possibly, behind the awful juvenile clichés, there was in her a garden and a twilight, and a palace gate—dim and adorable regions which happened to be lucidly and absolutely forbidden to me" (284). Employing the fairytale formulae of a remote and enchanting kingdom—one that faintly echoes the refrain of Poe's "Annabel Lee," with its "kingdom by the sea"—Humbert is not, for once, lamenting dead Annabel Leigh or his lost paradise. Instead, the romantic evocation of a walled garden, or private kingdom, pays homage to the child's remote and complex being.

The "real" Dolly Haze, Humbert now sees, does not inhabit that island of entranced time where nymphets disport themselves for his royal delectation. Instead, the child is an independent being possessed of a rich inner kingdom of her own—a private universe of thoughts and dreams, of ideas, feelings and flights of fancy having nothing whatsoever to do with him. By reversing the focus of his customary revery, Humbert suggests how his overweening

obsession with the imagined nymphet has ironically denied the child any imaginative life of her own. Passages like this one tend to support Frosch's contention that Nabokov's parody of romance acts "in a defensive and proleptic way." *Lolita* "doesn't criticize the romance mode, although it criticizes Humbert; it renders romance acceptable by anticipating our mockery and beating us to the draw." Frosch adds, "parody is Nabokov's way of getting as close to the romantic novel as possible . . . [by] re-creating it in a new form, one that is contemporary and original, not anachronistic and imitative."[24]

Locating the disease of Humbert's imagination in his betrayal of the child, Nabokov paradoxically reaffirms a central tenet of romantic faith: reverence for the child as the embodiment of creative consciousness. It is this romantic legacy that Rousseau, Wordsworth, Blake and others bequeathed to a later generation of novelists—from Charles Dickens to Mark Twain. Nabokov shares with his romantic precursors a belief in the child's natural innocence and creativity; like them, he celebrates "childish" spontaneity, intensity of perception, and freedom from deadening social conventions as the very source and embodiment of artistic vitality. "Imagination," he affirms in his autobiography, is "the supreme delight of the immortal and the immature" (*SM* 20).

The link between creative consciousness and the child, between the immortal and the immature, is dramatized throughout Nabokov's published work. Commenting on Charles Dickens, F.R. Leavis might well be speaking of Nabokov: what "makes the great Dickens 'a romantic novelist'" is that "he can feel with intensity that the world begins again with every child."[25] With just such intensity Nabokov describes, in *Speak, Memory*, the dawn of human consciousness as a creative explosion—an intuitive leap, a "stab of wonder" by which the human mind first awakened to the world. Each child born into the world, he adds, repeats that miracle as he rehearses, phylogenetically, "the initial blossoming of man's mind" (298). For Nabokov—who once described consciousness as "the only real thing in the world and the greatest mystery of all"—the child occupies a special place, an honored position, in his vision of reality and in his fiction (*BS* 188).[26] Viewed in this context, Humbert's admission—"it was always my habit and method to ignore Lolita's states of mind while comforting my own base self"—is doubly damning (287). The deprivation Lolita suffers at Humbert's hands, the loss of her childhood, implies in Nabokov's universe a betrayal of human consciousness and its creative potential.

It is Humbert's riotous imagination that, paradoxically, leads to his betrayal of the highest values of imagination: the spontaneity, vitality, and originality emblemized by the child. In striving to attain his ideal world or paradise, he selfishly deprives Lolita of her rightful childhood—and betrays the principles of romantic faith and freedom. It follows, therefore, that the source of Humbert's redemption, morally and artistically, lies in his gradual recognition of the child's essential reality. He suggestively acknowledges this

fact when he says of the memoir he has written: "I thought I would use these notes in toto at my trial, to save not my head, of course, but my soul. In mid-composition, however, I realized that I could not parade living Lolita. . . . I wish this memoir to be published only when Lolita is no longer alive" (308–10). Humbert's desire to protect Dolly Haze's present life as Mrs. Richard Schiller is only one manifestation of the respect for her independent reality that he finally achieves. The fact that she lives not only as a nymphet but as a victimized child in his painful confession testifies, in a much more telling way, to the degree of his enlightenment as well as his guilt.[27]

If Humbert's confession does not manage to "save his soul," it does grant him at least qualified redemption. This redemption, as I have suggested, is both moral and artistic, because it depends not only on the intensity of his remorse but on his vital perception and depiction of Lolita's reality as a child. The link between ethics and aesthetics suggested here is by no means exclusive to *Lolita*. The topic has, in fact, begun to generate interest and discussion among a number of scholars and critics. Their findings may come as a surprise, however, to those readers who still hold to Nabokov's early reputation as an aesthete indifferent to the ethical concerns of human beings.[28]

In *Lolita*, reverence for the child establishes both the ethical and the aesthetic context in which Humbert's solipsistic obsession must finally be judged. Humbert's self-condemnation near the end of the novel offers conclusive evidence on both counts: "Unless it can be proven to me . . . that in the infinite run it does not matter a jot that a North American girl-child named Dolores Haze had been deprived of her childhood by a maniac, unless this can be proven (and if it can, then life is a joke), I see nothing for the treatment of my misery but the melancholy and very local palliative of articulate art" (283). In stark language that abruptly diverges from the "fancy" prose style in which most of his narrative is cast, Humbert testifies to the reality of the child's autonomous being. Significantly, he now eschews the time-terms reserved for his nymphets, grounding the child's autonomy in space: the boundless space of the North-American continent, whose geographical extension and history patently invoke a universe beyond Humbert's private dominion.

Only in art can Humbert restore to the child he tyrannized—the child whose "life," as he says, he "broke"—some semblance of the reality and autonomy he denied her during their brief life together (p. 279). That is why Humbert's dual role and consciousness, as enchanter and enchanted, disguiser and revealer, is so crucial to the story he tells: it allows him to create the medium by which his art transcends as well as exposes the terms of his obsession. Only by transcending his solipsistic vision can his romantic tale achieve those qualities and values of imagination, of original creation, lacking in his self-serving fantasy. In the completed narration that is the novel, imagination—to recall the phrase Nabokov employs in *Speak, Memory*—once more discovers the link between the immortal and the immature: between the artist seeking

immortality in art and the immature child who embodies those creative powers by which such immortality is wrought.

The closing lines of the novel testify to Humbert's recognition of this important link between his articulate art and the child's sacred reality. To grant the mortal child immortality is not to demonize her image but rather to make her "live in the minds of later generations." That Humbert (under his author's guidance) achieves his goal is evinced not only by the clarity of his vision at the novel's end but by the semblance of reality he grants the child throughout. By his own avowal, then, Humbert discovers the ideal and timeless realm he had sought not in the romantic fixtures of solipsistic fantasy—that paradise-island of entranced time—but in the hard-won "refuge of art." And this, as he says in the novel's poignant closing line, "is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita."

Ellen Pifer

NOTES

1. According to Nabokov's biographer, Brian Boyd (1991, p. 264), Viking, Simon and Schuster, New Directions, Farrar Straus, and Doubleday all "thought it impossible to publish the book [*Lolita*] and avoid prosecution."
2. For Nabokov's account of *Lolita*'s checkered publishing history, see "*Lolita* and Mr. Girodias."
3. Albee, p. 42.
4. Ibid., pp. 11–12.
5. Nabokov had thought the original Russian version destroyed, until "a single copy of the story turned up," decades after its composition, in his papers ("Author's Note Two," p. 15).
6. As Appel points out, "Humbert goes to live in Charlotte Haze's house at 342 Lawn Street; he and Lolita inaugurate their illicit cross-country tour in room 342 of The Enchanted Hunters hotel; and in one year on the road they register in 342 motels and hotels. Given the endless mathematical combinations possible, the numbers seem to signal his entrapment by McFate (to use Humbert's personification)" (*AnL* xxviii).
7. In her foreword to a posthumous volume of Nabokov's poems, Véra Nabokov announces the "main theme" of Nabokov's work to be "the hereafter," which "saturates everything he wrote." She also draws attention to Nabokov's use of the Russian word *potustoronnost'*, or "the hereafter," on pp. 25–26 of his last novel, *Look at the Harlequins!* (Véra Nabokov, "Predislovie," p. 3).
8. A discussion of *Lolita*'s parodic structure informs nearly all of Appel's notes and commentary in *The Annotated Lolita*. Perhaps for this reason, the first book-length study of parody in Nabokov's fiction, by Dabney Stuart, does not examine *Lolita*.
9. Frosch, 1982, p. 181.
10. The assumption made by many critics and reviewers that in *Lolita* Nabokov sought to ridicule the nation which had welcomed him as an immigrant proved even more offensive to the author than the charge of pornography. In his Afterword to the novel, Nabokov indignantly rejects the "charge" that the novel is "anti-American," saying, "nothing is more exhilarating than [making fun of] philistine vulgarity." But, he adds,

no nation, group or social class has a monopoly on banality: any "proletarian from Chicago" can be as philistine as "a duke" ("On a Book Entitled *Lolita*" [*Lo* 315]).

11. Discussing the composition of the novel in his afterword, "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*," Nabokov says, "It had taken me some forty years to invent Russia and Western Europe, and now I was faced by the task of inventing America" (*Lo* 312). On another occasion he similarly states, "I did not know any American 12-year-old girls, and I did not know America; I had to invent America and Lolita. It had taken me some forty years to invent Russia and Western Europe, and now I was faced by a similar task, with a lesser amount of time at my disposal" (*SO* 26).
12. *AnL* 326. "The cycle of insect metamorphosis is Nabokov's controlling metaphor" for the "evolution of the artist's self through artistic creation" (*AnL* xxiii). A distinguished lepidopterist in his own right, Nabokov published numerous scientific papers on the subject, having also worked as a Research Fellow in the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University from 1942–48. For an assessment of his contribution to the field, see Boyd, 1991, pp. 114–15. [Editor's note: see also "Lepidoptera Studies" in this volume.]
13. Nabokov's full statement reads: "All art is deception and so is nature; all is deception in that good cheat, from the insect that mimics a leaf to the popular enticements of procreation" (*SO* 11).
14. Frosch, 1982, p. 177.
15. Lines from "Annabel Lee" are overtly parodied in the opening section of Humbert's narrative, just as Poe's "William Wilson" and other tales are parodied at the end. Not only does the title "Annabel Lee" turn up in the name of Humbert's dead childhood sweetheart—the twelve-year-old Annabel Leigh—but the poem's setting and theme are also recast in Humbert's tale of first love and loss. For more noted allusions to Poe's life and work, see *AnL* 328–32, 357–58. Appel also discusses "the Humbert-Quilty doubling" as a parody of the *Doppelgänger* motif in Poe and other nineteenth-century writers (*AnL* lx-lxi). [Editor's note: see also "Nabokov and Poe" in this volume.]
16. For a discussion of the *rusalka* as well as the figure of the "*incognita*," or stranger, in Blok and other writers who may have influenced Nabokov, see Johnson, 1992. Other critics who point out Nabokov's affinity with Blok include Alexandrov, 1991, p. 217; Boyd, 1990, pp. 93–95, 186; and Rampton, 1984, p. 117. [Editor's note: see also "Nabokov and Blok" in this volume.]
17. De Rougemont, p. 51.
18. Fitzgerald, p. 97.
19. Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 170–71; Russian *Lolita*, p. 49. [Editor's note: see also "*Lolita* in Russian" in this volume.]
20. De Rougemont notes the "touch of irony" that accompanies this as well as other allusions to romantic legend in *Lolita*: "The name of the hotel . . . , The Enchanted Hunters, obviously recalls the state of trance of the avowal scene in *Tristan*, but the entire description of the place aims precisely at disenchanting it." Rougemont falls wide of the mark, however, when he identifies this ironic "failure of the Myth" with the novel's failure to "move" us. Overlooking the theme of solipsistic imagination and its destructive effect on the child, he erroneously concludes that Lolita's immaturity—her failure to respond "to the fierce and tender passion of her elder lover" because she is a child—deprives the novel of "any spiritual horizon" and reduces it "to the dimensions of a genre-study of mores in the manner of Hogarth" (pp. 52–54).

21. For a discussion of Nabokov's parody of the Double theme in *Lolita*, see *AnL* lx-lxiii; for a more general discussion of Nabokov's subversion of the Double theme, see Pifer, 1980, pp. 97–118; and 1981, pp. 97–101.
22. "Author's Note Two," p. 16.
23. Clifton, pp. 153–54.
24. Frosch, 1982, p. 182.
25. Leavis, p. 23.
26. The observation belongs to Adam Krug, the protagonist of Nabokov's novel, *Bend Sinister*, but it echoes the author's well-known thoughts on the primacy of consciousness in human reality.
27. Nabokov told an interviewer, "I do think that Humbert Humbert in his last stage is a moral man because he realizes that he loves *Lolita* [sic]. . . . But it is too late, he has destroyed her childhood" (cited in Rampton, 1984, p. 202, n.34).
28. In his book-length study, Alexandrov, 1991, conclusively argues the connection between ethics and aesthetics in Nabokov's thought and fiction. For a brief overview of those critics who perceive moral and aesthetic values as mutually exclusive in Nabokov, see Alexandrov, pp. 3–22, with notes on pp. 235–37; and Pifer, 1980, pp. 1–6, with notes on pp. 173–75.

LOLITA IN RUSSIAN

Self-protection had always been a distinctive feature of Nabokov's artistic strategy. His novels often display a variety of safeguards against misinterpretation or deconstruction—anticipatory remarks, lampoons of adverse critical theories, metapoetic descriptions; his interviews and introductions first and foremost aim at defending the sovereign right of the writer to be judged only on his own terms. Nabokov's well-known obsession with strict control over translations of his books from Russian into English or from English into French can be explained as just another part of this *noli me tangere* policy, and it is nothing but logical that he would try to protect *Lolita*—the novel he thought his best, "the purest of all, the most abstract and carefully contrived"—from potential dangers of inadequate translations into his native Russian. "I imagined that in some distant future somebody might produce a Russian version of Lolita," he explained in an interview: "I trained my inner telescope upon that particular point in the distant future and I saw that every paragraph, pock-marked, as it is, with pit-falls, could lend itself to hideous mistranslation. In the hands of a harmful drudge, the Russian version of *Lolita* would be entirely degraded and botched by vulgar paraphrases or blunders. So I decided to translate it myself" (*SO* 38).

Started as a diversion in 1963, the translation of *Lolita* gradually absorbed Nabokov's creative energy and turned into a bittersweet reunion with his half-abandoned Russian language.[1] "I am now in the process of translating *Lolita* into Russian which is like completing the circle of my creative life. Or rather

starting a new spiral" (*SO* 52), he remarked in a 1965 interview, having in mind, perhaps, his brilliant translations of Rupert Brooke and Lewis Carroll published in the early 1920s that had revealed his genius much better than two contemporary collections of mediocre poems. But this time Nabokov was translating into Russian his own masterpiece—the acme of his bilingual *oeuvre*, and thereby returned *Lolita* to the language of its nourishing, though deeply hidden, roots—to the culture of the Russian Silver Age with its stilted eroticism and its adoration of Edgar Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde, Maeterlinck, and the French *poètes maudits*, to a Symbolist and post-Symbolist tradition (stretching from Briusov to Georgy Ivanov) of shockingly explicit "confessions" and "diaries" that aestheticized sexual perversions; to the images of Aleksandr Blok's poetry; and, last but not the least, to the themes and tropes of Vladimir Sirin's *Otchaianie* (*Despair*), *Dar* (*The Gift*), "Volshebnik" ("The Enchanter"). In spite of its overall American coloring, the style and vocabulary of the Russian *Lolita* evoke many new literary and cultural associations that can now and then provide a fresh perspective on the novel. All the numerous allusions to Edgar Poe and Paul Verlaine, for instance, acquire additional connotations because they bring to mind not only the poems referred to but also their famous Russian versions written, among others, by such prominent Symbolists as Bal'mont and Briusov—an important part of the Silver Age heritage. A pivotal "Carmen" motif in the novel has lost Humbert's English pun (Carmen = car men) but is enriched instead by more significant and complex connections with Blok's poetic cycle of the same title.[2] Nabokov's translation of "whooshing" (E 84) and "sonorous amplitude" (E 220) as the composite adjective "shirokoshumnyi/e" (R 72, 201), coined and used by Pushkin in his poem "Poet" ("A Poet"), with its antithesis between a poet's petty human existence and his sudden metamorphosis into an inspired Apollonian oracle, a vehicle of God-like poetic utterance, ironically underscores the futility of Humbert's attempts to mix up Life and Art.

Moreover, Nabokov chose to ignore the fact that his narrator did not have any Slavic background except for a disastrous marriage to a Polish woman who ran away with a stocky White Russian ex-colonel, and intercalated several purely Russian allusions into the translation as if to show definitively under whose "observation" Humbert Humbert was writing his "confession." Carl R. Proffer was the first to notice a very important interpolation in chapter 27 of Part Two: while in the original version Humbert ponders the tragic finales of *King Lear* and *Madame Bovary*, in the Russian one he adds to the list the open ending of *Eugene Onegin*.[3] As Gennady Barabtarlo pointed out, "a few pages later, Humbert the French Scholar quotes Verlaine, '*souvenir, souvenir, que me veux-tu*? Autumn was ringing in the air'," and Nabokov not only identifies the reference for the Russian reader (as he does almost invariably throughout the book) but also sets off an oblique but unmistakable echo coming from the famous autumnal poem by Tiutchev: "A Verlainesque autumn was ringing in the air that seemed to be made of crystal" (. . . v vozdukhe, kak by khrustal'nom

[E 261 / R 241])."[4] A few other examples of the same kind have gone unnoticed so far. In the Russian *Lolita* Rita's "pasty-faced" brother (E 258) quite unexpectedly sports "litso kak vymia" (R 239; "a face like an udder") which makes him a twin of the dreadful executioner in Gumilev's poem "Zabludivshiisia tramvai" ("The Lost Streetcar"). Humbert the Russian scholar whines about Lolita's having betrayed "his pathetic endearments" to Quilty in the words of Baratynsky: "moia malen'kaia Karmen vydala negodiaiu zhalkii shifr laskovykh imen i svoenravnykh prozvanii, kotorye ia ei daval" (R 277; "my little Carmen betrayed the pathetic code of tender names and wilful appellations I had given her to the scoundrel").[5] The mysterious Laqueue in the fake French quotation "Réveillez-vous, Laqueue, il est temps de mourir" (E 290) turns into Tropman (R 270)—a notorious nineteenth-century murderer whose execution was described in an essay by Turgenev. Humbert's gleeful anticipation of Quilty's imminent end, "he is as good as destroyed" (E 282), becomes the solemn and stylized "uchast' ego reshena" (R 262; "his fate has been decided"), which reverberates with echoes of the opening phrase of Pushkin's autobiographical prose fragment, "Uchast' moia reshena . . ." ("My fate has been decided . . .").

These allusive interpolations and changes have been overlooked even by such astute critics of Nabokov as Jane Grayson and Brian Boyd, who contend that *Lolita* "may be termed a fairly close translation,"[6] one that is "for the most part . . . as literal as any of his other translations" in which "he opts for sense over sound."[7] I cannot but agree with Gennady Barabtarlo's objections to dismissing the Russian *Lolita* as a rigid literal translation lacking the stylistic exuberance of the original, as well as with his elegantly expressed assumption that it "is dimpled and freckled with nice little additions and elaborations and tricks that beam at the bilingual re-reader."[8] If one consults the useful *English-Russian Dictionary of Lolita*,[9] which contains about 7,000 entries demonstrating Nabokov's *non-standard* rendering of English words and phrases, and if one studies the appendix to Barabtarlo's essay—a long list (far from complete) of major variances between the two versions of *Lolita* and takes into account scores of similar discrepancies pinpointed and discussed in a number of other sources,[10] it will be clear that the Russian *Lolita* should in fact be considered a *new redaction* of the novel, its second avatar in a parallel linguistic and cultural reality, rather than a bleak copy of the dazzling original.

True, Nabokov's translation of *Lolita* is not totally unmarred. "I've lots of difficulties with technical terms," he confessed to an interviewer, "especially with those pertaining to the motor car. . . . I also have trouble with finding the right Russian terms for clothes, varieties of shoes, items of furniture, and so on" (*SO* 52–53). Some of the equivalents and paraphrases he devised to render various Americanisms do sound out of tune; it seems also that even such a seasoned bilingual stylist as Nabokov would now and then succumb to the inertial force of English syntax and idiom and stumble into a solecism or a clumsy, too close-at-hand substitute.[11] In the postscript to the Russian *Lolita* Nabokov expressed bitter disappointment with his own performance and

complained that his old Russian strings had gotten rusty: "Alas, that 'wondrous Russian tongue' that, it seemed to me, was waiting for me somewhere, was flowering like a faithful springtime behind a tightly locked gate, whose key I had held in safekeeping so many years, proved to be non-existent, and there is nothing behind the gate but charred stumps and a hopeless autumnal distance, and the key in my hand is more like a skeleton key" (R 296).[12] The sheer elegance of this very lament, however, controverts its message: all in all, Nabokov's Russian in *Lolita* is hardly more artificial and strained than the English of the original, and a certain stiffness in its translatory joints is fully compensated by the suppleness and grace of euphonious lyrical passages, by ingenious paronomasia, by the flexibility of a fabulously rich vocabulary and intonation, by the intense interplay of sense and sound, of outlandish "material" and indigenous language, of text and its subtexts. For twentieth-century Russian prose *Lolita* was a miracle of resurrection, a rebirth of its modernist panaesthetic tradition that had broken off with Sirin's transformation into Nabokov and his Soviet counterparts—Dobychin, Olesha, Platonov, Zamiatin—who either died or were forced into silence. In the final analysis, even its foreignness proved to be beneficial because it gave the aged tradition an invigorating jolt (not unlike Joseph Brodsky's injection of "Englishness" into Russian poetry) that helped it to gain new momentum and direction.

The appearance of the Russian *Lolita*, however, meant much more than Nabokov's spectacular return to his native language or a display of his translatory inventiveness. As the writer admitted, the process of supervising his French translators and wrestling with their "booboos and boners" allowed him to reach a final stage of his work on a book—that of *rereading* it: "What judgment do I then pronounce? Am I still satisfied with my work? Does the afterglow of achievement correspond to the foreglow of conception?" (*SO* 111). In spite of Nabokov's persistent disclaimers, some answers to these questions would not always be entirely positive, and self-translation provided him with a unique opportunity to make certain emendations in a text after rereading it (a gift for himself and for the ideal *bilingual* reader) and, if necessary, to influence its subsequent perception. A new version may obliquely comment on the old one by unmasking an important allusion overlooked by readers or reaccentuating a motif, may endorse or disprove an accepted critical interpretation, may reveal a meaning hidden too deeply, or efface a misleading association. The Russian *Lolita* is probably the best example of self-translation as a powerful tool for self-exegesis.

Besides purely technical substitutes and glosses for numerous English puns and allusions which were obviously motivated by differences between languages and/or cultural and literary backgrounds,[13] the Russian *Lolita* incorporates a whole layer of cross-references and indices that have nothing to do with the problems of translation and serve as prompts pointing at some missed key or hint or parody in the body of the original text—the author's discreet censure, as it were, of his inattentive readers and critics. Thus, if it were

not for the Russian *Lolita*, we would hardly be able to notice a secret parodic indicator in Nabokov's descriptions of one of Humbert's neighbors in Ramsdale—"the odious spinster, trying to conceal her morbid inquisitiveness under a mask of dulcet goodwill" (E 180), whom the protagonist calls "Miss Fenton Lebone." In the English version a hint at her literary origins is rather vague: "I had always thought that type of haddocky spinster with the obscene mind was the result of considerable literary inbreeding in modern fiction"(E 206), remarks Humbert Humbert. But the Russian text concretizes the subject of the lampoon by alluding to "*incestuous* inbreeding in the modern *American novel*" ("skreshchivanie rodstvom sviazannykh lits v sovremennom amerikanskom romane," R 187; italics added) and thereby pinpointing William Faulkner; for he is the modern American novelist who portrayed odious spinsters with an obscene mind in a number of his most famous works (such as *A Rose for Emily* or *Light in August*) and persistently exploited the theme of incest. With this key in hand, it is easy to unravel a cluster of hidden allusions to Faulkner in the English version and to second-guess, for instance, that the very name "Fenton *Lebone*" mimics "Bon," the Frenchified pseudonym of a character in *Absalom, Absalom!*—the novel in which one of the narrators is another "spinster with an obscene mind" and the dark secrets of incestuous relationships ruin the protagonists. In all probability it is Faulkner's florid style with its endless chains of adjectives and overwrought pathetic fallacies, in general, and the recurrent image of the "iron New England night" of *Absalom, Absalom!,* in particular, that are parodied in the phrase preceding Humbert's metaliterary digression: ". . . the damp black night of a sour New England spring had been breathlessly listening to us" (E 206).[14]

Even more striking is a key provided by the Russian *Lolita* for a pivotal lyrical passage near the end of the novel where Humbert Humbert recalls "certain moments, let us call them icebergs in paradise, when after having had my fill of her . . . I would gather her in my arms with, at last, a mute moan of human tenderness . . . and the tenderness would deepen to shame and despair, and I would lull and rock my lone light Lolita in my marble arms, and moan in her warm hair, and caress her at random and mutely ask her blessing . . ." (E 285). In his translation, Nabokov not only opts for sound over sense and skillfully retains the alliteration of L's and R's but adds a simile which likens Humbert's repentance to that of King Lear in Act Five of Shakespeare's tragedy: ". . . ia uteshal i baiukal sirotlivuiu, legon'kuiu Lolitu lezhavshuiu na mramornoi moei grudi, i, urcha, zaryval litso v ee teplye kudri, i poglazhival ee naugad i kak LIR prosil u neie blagosloveniia [asked her blessing like Lear] . . ." (R 265). It turns out, therefore, that Humbert's outburst of feeling from the very beginning was designed as a covert allusion to the final scene in *King Lear*, in which the hero calls Cordelia back to prison and says to her, "When thou dost *ask me blessing*, I'll kneel down / And *ask of thee forgiveness*" (V, iii; italics added), and when he enters with his dead daughter *in his arms*. Thus, the original version of *Lolita* already contained several hints at its

Shakespearean subtext in the alliterative pattern, in the choice of words (the twice repeated "in my arms," "ask her blessing"), and in the conspicuously awkward word combination "marbLE ARms," which conceals the name of the king.

The allusion to inconsolable Lear who has lost everything—his kingdom, his sanity, his beloved daughter, his dream of happiness amongst "gilded butterflies," echoes Humbert's earlier thoughts on the irretrievability of tragic finales[15] and is implicitly connected with scores of other literary and historical allusions in the novel whose only common denominator is the theme of the "death of a child / a beloved." The very fact that Nabokov did not want it to be overlooked suggests a possible parallel between the protagonist and King Lear that could modify accepted interpretations of *Lolita.* It would not be totally groundless to suppose that when Humbert is writing his book about Lolita he, like mad Lear, *knows* "she's gone for ever" but refuses to admit it and tries to make her "stay a little" by talking to her and of her as if she were alive,[16] by inventing a relatively happy future for her, by encoding death as abduction and by daydreaming of avenging himself on his past and on the "slave" of his fate (cf. King Lear's wail addressed to his *dead* daughter: "Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little! [. . .] I killed the slave that was a-hanging thee" [V, iii]). In this case, the entire chain of incidents in the novel that explains both the mystery of Lolita's disappearance and the causes of the narrator's confession—Lolita's elopement with Quilty, the "paper-chase," the letter from "Mrs. Richard F. Schiller,"[17] Humbert's last meeting with pregnant Lolita, his going to Ramsdale and Parkington, killing Clare Quilty and getting arrested—should be interpreted as cunning fictions by the hero, verbal adventures on the way to *Read*sburg (as he calls his destination in the final conversation with Lolita[18]), his desperate gamble and gambit designed to outwit and defeat omnipotent "McFate." A comparison between the Russian and English versions of *Lolita* shows that Nabokov at least played with the possibility of such an interpretation and tried to strengthen it in the translation. Quite a number of revisions and additions in Part Two of the novel tend to undermine further "a foundation of verisimilitude" (E 248) and to emphasize the fictitious, "dream-like" nature of the discourse. For example, in the allusive catalogue of "derisive hints" and "insulting pseudonyms" that Quilty presumably used in the motel registers, there appear anachronistic cryptograms referring to the future of the text being written rather than to the past of the events being described—for example, to the very name Humbert Humbert, which will be invented only three years later, or to the number of chapters in the novel. It is only the Russian Humbert Humbert (or, to be more exact, Gumbert Gumbert) who enjoys "miraculous freedom characteristic of dreams" (R 269) during his last visit to Ramsdale and remarks that a door in Quilty's house was not properly closed "as in a dream" (R 302), who draws attention to concealed parallelisms between his own reminiscences of the past and the story of Lolita's life after

she had left him,[19] and in the last paragraph of the book suddenly states that he is currently in New York (R 286) and, consequently, not in prison.

Those critics who have already interpreted the final, phantasmagoric chapters of *Lolita* as a purely fictitious narration under the disguise of autobiography see the planted clue to such a reading in a puzzling chronological discrepancy. In the very end of his manuscript, Humbert mentions that his work on his confession has taken him fifty-six days, and, since we know the day of his death, November 16, 1952, from the novel's Foreword, the start of his writing frenzy can be dated as no later than September 22 of the same year. However, as Elizabeth W. Bruss was the first to notice, "the fateful letter from Lolita, the letter which reunites them after her disappearance and allows Humbert to learn the name of his fiend-rival (and eventually to gain his murderous revenge) is said to have arrived on September 22, 1952."[20] Because both parts of a contradiction, at least in a Hobbesian definition, cannot possibly be true, one confronts the obvious alternative: either to attribute the discrepancy to an error on the part of Nabokov and/or his hero, or to admit that all the incidents occurring after the crucial date of September 22 were imagined by Humbert.

Again, it is the Russian *Lolita* that provides additional arguments in favor of the latter suggestion. According to the writer's own testimony, in the translation he had corrected some chronological errors,[21] and when Alfred Appel, Jr., was working on *The Annotated Lolita*, Nabokov authorized him to make corresponding corrections in the original (*SL* 408). Yet the most important and trickiest anachronism—the September 22, 1952 date—not only remained unchanged but became much more conspicuous: if the reader of the English version may easily miss it in a casual parenthesis placed *after* the letter from Lolita (E 267), in the Russian translation the crucial date is mentioned in the previous chapter (R 245), side by side with Humbert's most ambiguous remarks about writing and "Proustianized" fancy. Moreover, the Russian Humbert makes another, very suggestive chronological slip (also connected with a Proustian allusion) when he specifies that the last part of his book, which describes "three empty years" of his life and might be called, after Proust, "Dolorès Disparue,"[22] covers the period "from early July, 1949 to *mid-November*, 1952" ("ot nachala iiulia 1949 do serediny noiabria 1952," R 234; italics added). This addition correlates with the chronological clue in the original and can imply, I believe, only one thing—that on September 22 the narrator, to use Nabokov's words about Proust's Marcel, "received a shock of inspiration . . . causing him to decide to set to work without delay upon his book" (*LL* 210)—the book in which he transfigured his past and made up a plausible future for himself and *his* Lolita.

"The real writer should ignore all readers but one, that of the future, who in his turn is merely the author reflected in time" (340), says Koncheyev in *The Gift*, himself such an ideal reader imagined by the protagonist. If this statement reflects Nabokov's beliefs, his own "doubles" reflected in time

should first and foremost be at least bilingual—that is, capable of appreciating the elaborate and incessant interplay of two languages in the mind of the writer. It is for these readers that Nabokov created his Russian-English pairs, his "twice-told" texts which reflect, explain, and complement each other. As Elizabeth Beaujour remarks, "because self-translation and the (frequently) attendant reworking makes a text retrospectively incomplete, both versions become avatars of a hypothetical total text in which the versions in both languages would rejoin one another and be reconciled."[23] Of course, a leading part in the duo will always belong to the original, and the troublesome history of *Lolita*'s perception in contemporary Russia, where it has often been discussed (since its first official publication in 1989) without proper knowledge of both the English version and critical response to it, testifies to that. But even in the country of *Lolita*'s birth, its most sophisticated readers could profit greatly from considering the Russian counterpart of Nabokov's nymphet and coming nearer to the totality of the author's vision.

Alexander Dolinin

NOTES

1. The stages of Nabokov's work on the Russian *Lolita* have been described in detail by Brian Boyd, 1991, pp. 472–73, 488–91, 501–04. All page references to *Lolita* will be given in the text. For the sake of clarity, page references to the English text (New York: Vintage International, 1989) will be preceded by an "E"; page references to the Russian text (New York: Phaedra, 1967) will be preceded by an "R."
2. It should be noted that in the Russian *Lolita* Vivian Darkbloom—Vladimir Nabokov's anagrammatic pseudonym—becomes "Vivian Damor-Blok" with an explanation added: "Damor—a stage name, Blok—from one of her first husbands" (preface to the Russian *Lolita*, n.p.). This ambivalent allusion establishes a link between Lolita and a succession of symbolic female images in Aleksandr Blok's poetry—the Beautiful Lady ("Prekrasnaia dama" in Russian, cf. "**DAM**or"), the Unknown Woman, Carmen—and hints at Blok's love affair with the addressee of the "Carmen" cycle—an opera singer Liubov' ("love" in Russian, cf. "**DAMOR**") Del'mas.
3. Proffer, 1984, p. 258. Cf.: "Nikogda ne uedet s Oneginym v Italiiu kniaginia N." (R 245; "Princess N. will never go to Italy with Onegin"). Gennady Barabtarlo insightfully defined this phrase as "a hybrid reference to *Eugene Onegin* and *Anna Karenin*" (Barabtarlo, 1988, p. 238; see also Dolinin, 1991, p. 406).
4. Barabtarlo, 1988, p. 238.
5. Cf. Baratynsky: "Svoenravnoe prozvan'e / Dal ia miloi v lasku ei: / Bezotchetnoe sozdan'e / Detskoi nezhnosti moei. . . ." The wilful appellation that the persona of the poem gives to his lover should not be disclosed because it is to serve as the only sign by which they will recognise each other after death.
6. Grayson, p. 10.
7. Boyd, 1991, p. 489.

8. Barabtarlo, 1988, p. 238.
9. See Nakhimovski and Paperno, 1981.
10. See C. Brown, 1968; Grayson, pp. 120–24; Cummins, 1977; Proffer, 1984; Dolinin, "Vstupitel'naia stat'ia."
11. See some illustrative examples of *Lolita*'s "un-Russian" Russian in Grayson, pp. 183–84.
12. I use here the translation by Earl D. Simpson published in Rivers and Nicol, 1982, pp. 188–94, 190. See a most interesting discussion of this statement in Beaujour, pp. 115–17.
13. In the Russian *Lolita* Nabokov not only provides intratextual glosses on quite a number of English and French literary allusions but also adds a short glossary in the end of the book with translations of foreign phrases and occasional commentary. For a detailed discussion of these additions, see Proffer, 1984, and Barabtarlo, 1989.
14. In a letter to Edmund Wilson who had sent *Light in August* to him, Nabokov expressed a very low opinion of Faulkner's work: "I detest these puffs of stale romanticism, coming all the way up from Marlinsky and V. Hugo . . . Faulkner's belated romanticism and quite impossible biblical rumblings and 'starkness' (which is not starkness at all but skeletonized triteness), and all the rest of the bombast seem to me so offensive that I can only explain his popularity in France by the fact that all her own popular mediocre writers (Malraux included) of recent years have also had their fling at *l'homme marchait, la nuit était sombre.*" When Wilson persisted in his praises of Faulkner's genius, Nabokov answered bluntly, "down with Faulkner!" (*NWL* 212–13, 230, 231).
15. Cf.: "No matter how many times we reopen "King Lear," never shall we find the good king banging his tankard in high revelry, all woes forgotten, at a jolly reunion with all three daughters and their lapdogs" (E 265 / R 245).
16. That is, Humbert Humbert is doing to his readers what "a very old barber" in Kasbeam has done to him: the latter, let us recall, "babbled of a baseball-playing son of his, . . . wiped his glasses . . . interrupted his tremulous scissor work to produce faded newspaper clippings," and only in the very end Humbert realized with a shock "that the mustached young ball player had been dead for the last thirty years" (E 213). In his postscript "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*" Nabokov named the Kasbeam barber among the images he would pick out for "special delectation" and remarked that the scene had cost him a month of work (E 316). Apparently, Nabokov was hinting at his having looked for a natural, inconspicuous, casual portrayal that could at the same time serve as a veiled metapoetic description of the novel's structural design—a deceptive masterstroke of the kind Nabokov was especially good at. It should be noted that Kasbeam anagrammatizes "be a mask" and "same," that Lolita, like the barber's son, is a "young ball player," and that Humbert will leaf through old newspaper files trying to recapture Lolita's image.
17. The Russian version transliterates Lolita's married name as "Skiller," not "Shiller" and therefore kills its German associations. The play is, of course, on "kill / (artistic) skill."
18. Readsburg is the only toponym in the novel whose lexical meaning Nabokov brings out in the Russian translation, where he renames it "Lektoburg" (E 273 / R 254).
19. When Lolita tells Humbert that Quilty's Duk Duk Ranch "had burned to the ground, *nothing* remained, just a charred heap of rubbish. It was so *strange*, so *strange*" (E 277), he comments: "Chto zh, u Mak-Ku bylo tozhe pokhozhee imia, i tozhe sgorel dom"

(R 257 [Well, McCoo also had a similar name and his house also burned])—a direct allusion to the incident in Part One that led to Humbert's meeting Lolita.

20. Bruss, 1976, p. 145; for a detailed discussion of this discrepancy, see also Tekiner, Toker, 1989, and Dolinin, "Vstupitel'naia stat'ia."
21. He calls them "Tolstoy-time items" (*SL* 434), alluding to the chronological discrepancies in *Anna Karenina* that he discussed in his lectures on Tolstoy (see *LRL* 190–98, 214, n. 22, 220, n. 44).
22. The allusion is to *Albertine disparue* (*Vanished Albertine*, or, in the Moncrieff translation, *The Sweet Cheat Gone*), the penultimate part of *Remembrance of Things Past*—one of the most important (and least studied) subtexts for *Lolita* that deserves special disscussion. In context, the "vanished" of the title actually means "dead," for the novel describes the narrator's tormenting efforts to recapture the image of his lover after her sudden death.
23. Beaujour, p. 112.

LOOK AT THE HARLEQUINS!

Look at the Harlequins!, or LATH, as Nabokov referred to it, was his last completed novel, appearing in 1974. Its theme, broadly speaking, is the mystery of personal identity and the transcendence of the self to be found in love and art. More immediately, LATH is a parody of (auto-)biography that plays off the naive expectations of readers (and writers) who confuse art and life, imagination and reality. Careless biographers are a particular target.

LATH was assertedly triggered by Nabokov's reaction to the draft version of Andrew Field's *Nabokov: His Life in Part* which Nabokov was reading and correcting at the time he launched his final novel.[1] Nabokov, an intensely private man, held stong reservations about biography. He had dealt with the theme in his first English novel, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941), as well as having written his own artfully stylized autobiography, *Speak, Memory*. For all its intricate beauty, the latter remains reticent about the author's emotional life and his art. Readers looking for the autobiographical sources of Nabokov's writings and for personal details of his life found little to assuage their curiosity. Always amused by readers who wished to link the events of his novels to his personal life, Nabokov was now outraged at Field's more sophisticated but sometimes wildly speculative probings into his past and even more at the number of factual inaccuracies. Field, he felt, had invented a Nabokov that Nabokov himself often failed to recognize. Nabokov, Brian Boyd suggests, set out to outfield Field by creating a parody, a fictive autobiography of a mad writer that fulfills the expections of naive readers by seeming to lay bare the author's amorous existence and the connections between the hero's life and his writings. The fatal fallacy of confusing art and

life is revealed when it becomes apparent that the autobiographer has unwittingly fabricated his life and works from those of "another" writer. Nabokov then goes beyond this, for LATH ends in an affirmation of two of Nabokov's most deeply cherished beliefs: love and art as inviolable mysteries that transcend the solipsistic prison of the self.[2]

Early periodical reviews of LATH were mixed.[3] The consensus was that the book was narcissistic, hermetic, and so laden with arcane references to Nabokov's earlier work that only Nabokov buffs could make sense of it. Academic critics G. M. Hyde and David Rampton both asserted that it was the work of an aging writer trapped within his own literary persona.[4] There appeared to be some truth to this, for Nabokov had illustrated his theme of the naive confusion of life and art by massive internal allusion to his own work. Other critics were quicker to recognize how the network of auto-allusions were central to the novel's theme. Herbert Grabes was one of the first to elaborate this, as was Richard Patteson who traced out various sets of parallels before arriving at the conclusion that Nabokov's hero eventually learns to maintain his perceptual balance in the mental minefield that lies between life and art.[5] In one of the best readings of LATH, Lucy Maddox argues that Vadim's periodic mental illness is a consequence of his inevitable failure to force a template onto his life and art and that his cure results from his final acceptance of "reality" in the form of his fourth wife.[6] Paul Bruss follows the same line of thought but casts his argument in terms of "texts." Vadim ultimately realizes that there is and can be no definitive text that sets his identity.[7] Life rather than art defines reality.

A more specialized study by Herbert Grabes examines LATH in the context of "the deconstruction of autobiography," while Suzanne Fraysse looks at LATH's narrative strategy and its generic status vis-à-vis *Speak, Memory*.[8] LATH's narrative strategy is also the subject of a study by Maurice Couturier.[9] Martin Green and John Swan explore Nabokov's use of the harlequin image as part of their larger study of *commedia dell'arte* figures and modernism.[10] Didier Machu probes LATH's theme of identity and transformation, drawing upon H. G. Wells's tale *The Island of Dr. Moreau*.[11] Russian subtexts have been annotated by Carl Proffer, and D. Barton Johnson has suggested that the twin world cosmology underlying LATH finds its source in Martin Gardner's book *The Ambidextrous Universe: Left, Right and the Fall of Parity*.[12] Johnson also offers a more general reading, focusing on the relationships of the novel's characters and the two worlds they inhabit.[13]

LATH is cast in the form of the autobiography of the distinguished Anglo-Russian writer Vadim Vadimovich N. (henceforth VV), born like Nabokov in 1899. Composed in the aftermath of a mysterious paralytic stroke, VV's memoir is no ordinary one and is perhaps best described in the words of the narrator himself: "In this memoir my wives and my books are interlaced monogrammatically like some sort of watermark or *ex libris* design; and in

writing this oblique autobiography—oblique, because dealing mainly not with pedestrian history but with the mirages of romantic and literary matters—I consistently try to dwell as lightly as inhumanly possible on the evolution of my mental illness. Yet Dementia is one of the characters in my story" (85). We shall see that "Dementia" is not merely "one of the characters" but that she is the leading lady, at least until she is displaced by "Reality" in the form of VV's last love. The narrator's works and women (apart from the last) are solely the offspring of "Dementia" who is both his Mistress and his Muse. The autobiography deals quite literally with "*mirages* of romantic and literary matters" (my emphasis).

The narrator, Prince VV, asserts that he is the son of an aristocratic Russian couple who abandoned him to the care of relatives—thanks to the frenetic pace of their divorces, remarriages, re-divorces, and so on. Their neurasthenic, dreamy son is left in the custody of a grand-aunt, who resides on one of the family estates called Marevo, a Russian word appropriately meaning "mirage." It is this aunt (apparently also imaginary) who advises her morose seven- or eight-year-old charge to "Look at the harlequins!" "Play! Invent the world! Invent reality!" (8–9). VV, who is already subject to the periods of madness that will punctuate his life, does invent a world but it is not Reality.

Following the revolution, VV shoots a Red Army border guard and makes his way to London where he discovers a patron, the Anglophilic Count Nikifor Nikodimovich Starov. The Count, who had "graced several great Embassies during a spacious span of international intercourse," is a quondam lover of VV's "beautiful and bizarre" mother (10). In fact, we shall see that Count Starov, by virtue of his "spacious span of international intercourse," is the progenitor of several of the characters of LATH. Thanks to the Count's beneficence, his new protégé attends Cambridge where, in his final term, the spring of 1922, he is invited to a newly inherited Riviera villa by his classmate Ivor Black. Here he meets Ivor's sister, Iris, who becomes the memoirist's first wife. The parentage of the fond brother and sister is no less murky than that of VV himself. Their mother, Iris says, was "American and horrible," while the businessman father had "good connections"—specifically (it later develops) in London diplomatic circles (29, 177). This becomes strangely portentous when Iris and VV, newly married, first visit the Count. While Iris has tea in an alcove "illuminated by a resplendent portrait . . . of the notorious beauty, Mme. de Blagidze" (50), the Count asks VV his wife's maiden name. Slowly shaking his head, he then inquires the name of Iris's mother.

VV and Iris move to Paris, where during the seven years of their marriage, the narrator embarks upon his literary career, publishing three Russian volumes—*Tamara* (1925), *Pawn Takes Queen* (1927), and *Plenilune* (1929). Not knowing Russian, Iris is somewhat isolated from her husband's literary milieu. It is through her vain effort to learn Russian that she becomes the object of the amorous attentions of Lieutenant Wladimir Starov-Blagidze, the husband of her tutoress. The lieutenant, VV learns, is another "protégé" of

Count Starov. Starov-Blagidze, three or four years senior to VV, is apparently the result of a liaison between the Count and the "notorious St. Petersburg courtesan" depicted in the above-mentioned portrait (11). Already half-mad from a Russian Civil War head wound and now spurned by Iris, the lieutenant runs amok and shoots Iris, who, like VV and Starov-Blagidze himself, is seemingly a child of the Count.

VV meets his second wife, Annette (Anna Ivanovna Blagovo), when he hires the long-necked Botticellian beauty as the typist for his last and best Russian novel, *Podarok otchizne (Gift for the Fatherland)*. Notwithstanding her inept typing, her thoroughly philistine tastes, and her frigidity, VV is so strongly attracted to her that he enters his second and longest marriage. In 1939, VV, who has now completed his first English novel, *See under Real*, emigrates with Annette to the United States where he joins the faculty of Quirn University. Here over the years VV adds to his modest reputation as an English author. Meanwhile, a daughter, Isabel, is born on New Year's Day, 1942. The marriage, never good, comes under the blighting influence of their ex-Soviet landlady who befriends and carries off Annette and the four-year-old Isabel to her lakeside cottage after VV dallies with Dolly von Borg. The brief affair with Dolly, who successfully schemes to break up her lover's marriage, is the long-delayed consummation of furtive fondlings with the compliant eleven-year-old Dolly while Vadim had been a house guest of her Russian émigré grandparents in Paris.

The covert kinship that characterized VV's first marriage is quite possibly, if obscurely, present in the second. Anna Blagovo is the daughter of a Tsarist army surgeon, who married a provincial belle from the neighborhood of one of VV's family estates, presumably Marevo (112). It may well be that Count Starov, an "admirer" of VV's mother, was a visitor at the estate and its environs. Further, there are hints that Annette herself may have been acquainted with the late Lieutenant Starov-Blagidze. This becomes apparent at the time of VV's proposal. Although the status-conscious Annette agrees to marry her titled suitor, she finds Vadim strange—unlike other men she has met. In answer to VV's suggestions as to whom she has met ("trepanners? trombonists? astronomists?"), she blandly replies "mostly military men, . . . officers of Wrangel's army . . ." (108). That Lt. Starov-Blagidze, who had served under Wrangel, has been subject to trepanning (possibly at the hands of Annette's father) is quite probable, for we know he suffers from "a terrifying tic" as a result of his head wound (59). Still more curious is VV's choice of "astronomists," for the initial syllable is the Latin word for "star," while the first five letters form an anagram corresponding to the first five letters of "Starov." In short, Anna Blagovo, like Iris Black, may well be the half-sister, as well as the wife, of the narrator.

In 1953, some seven years after Annette flees VV, she perishes in a flood, and Isabel, now eleven and called Bel, returns to live with her father. For two blissful years Bel and her adoring father are inseparable companions,

idyllically wandering from motel to motel through the Far West. The intimacy of father and daughter, as well as Bel's precocity, lead to ugly rumors which VV seeks to counter by marrying Louise Adamson, widow of a famous Quirn poet. Beautiful Louise, a sexually and financially avaricious celebrity collector, is all too ready to wed the novelist, who is reportedly a leading candidate for "the most prestigious prize in the world" (174). She is, however, equally quick to cool when the prize is not forthcoming. Her relationship with Bel is abysmal, and the daughter is soon packed off to a Swiss finishing school from which she elopes with a youthful American defector to Russia. VV finds solace by reliving their life and travels in the transmuted form of what will be his most successful (and sensational) novel, *A Kingdom by the Sea* (1962).

Louise, VV's third wife, is less obviously implicated than her predecessors in the incestuous network of the author's life, but she, too, is not without family ties to her husband's tangled past. Shortly before his marriage proposal VV spends an evening with Louise and her cousin Lady Morgain, the fat and fiftyish daughter of a former American Ambassador to England (175). Fay Morgain mentions to VV that she had known Iris Black in London around 1919 when she herself was "a starry-eyed American gal" (177). The possibility presents itself that Louise's cousin was also acquainted with Iris's (and VV's) real father, the former diplomat Count Starov. This is also suggested by her comment that she was "a starry-eyed gal" in a sentence that is at strong stylistic variance with the rest of her mannered speech. Louise, too, may be a member of Count Starov's consanguineal brood.

VV meets the woman who will become his fourth and final grand love in September 1969, on the day that the now-notorious author submits his resignation to Quirn University. As VV is leaving campus, a bulky folder spills, and he is aided in gathering up its contents by a young woman coming from the library. As the girl helps VV collect his scattered papers, she inquires about Bel (now in Russia). The narrator suddenly remembers her name and "in a photic flash of celestial color" sees her and her schoolmate Bel "looking like twins, silently hating each other, both in blue coats and white hats, waiting to be driven somewhere by Louise" (226). This young woman, who is throughout referred to only as "you" and who shares Bel's birthdate (January 1, 1942), becomes VV's lover during the completion of his last novel, *Ardis*. The couple resettle on the Continent.

VV is markedly reluctant to speak of the details of his relationship with "you," saying that "Reality would only be adulterated" (226). In consequence, we learn little of the background and identity of VV's last love. She speaks a "lovely, elegant Russian," has studied Turgenev in Oxford and Bergson in Geneva, and has "family ties with good old Quirn and Russian New York" (228). Unlike her predecessors, "you" knows her lover's complete *oeuvre*. The question we are approaching is, of course, that of her place, if any, in the intricate network of Count Starov's progeny. The only clue to her history is her Russian background, and this is too slender a basis for speculation. Negative

evidence is more to the point. Alone of VV's inamoratas, "you" lacks any association with the anagrammatic "star motif" that signals Count Starov's progeny. In sum, we must conclude that VV's final love, "you" remains outside the Starov family orbit. This assumption is supported by VV's persistent association of "you" and "Reality," an association strikingly absent from his account of his previous loves.

It is a curious and significant fact that at least two of VV's wives have the letter sequence "BL" in their names: Iris Black and Anna Blagovo. The writer's beloved daughter Bel also enters into this alphabetic series. Louise's family name is unknown, but one of the names from her past is Blanc (181). Also of note is that Starov's other son (and Iris Black's lover) bears his mother's family name, Blagidze, and that, on occasion, the narrator refers to himself, *inter alia*, as Blonsky (232). All these characters are the children of Count Starov, and it is their incestuous consanguinity that is denoted by the alphabetic emblem "BL" in their names. The sound sequence is, moreover, not randomly chosen. In answer to a query about the theme of incest in *Ada*, Nabokov replied: "Actually, I don't give a damn for incest one way or the other. I merely like the 'bl' sound in siblings, bloom, blue, bliss, sable" (*SO* 123). "BL" is Nabokov's private emblem for the incest theme. That VV's last love, "you," has no connection with the "BL" incest emblem is strong evidence of her unique reality among the narrator's inamoratas. She represents a turning outward toward the real world, away from the incestuous, solipsistic fantasy world of the often-deranged hero.

It is now time to consider the other heroine in VV's autobiography—Dementia, who is the source of several star-crossed characters. Dementia appropriately attends both the beginning and ending of VV's tale of love and prose. In the memoirist's earliest reference to himself, he already harbors "the secrets of a confirmed madman" (8). At nine or ten, he says, his morbid childhood terrors were supplanted "by more abstract and trite anxieties (problems of infinity, eternity, identity, and so forth)" which he believes to have saved his reason (7). This belief is open to question, for these anxieties seem to be at the root of his psychotic episodes which last from several weeks to several years, sometimes requiring hospitalization.

VV's mental condition, vaguely described as "a nervous complaint that skirted insanity" (5), displays a number of symptoms, among which the more mundane are severe headaches, dizziness, neuralgia, and confusion about his surroundings. Attacks are sometimes occasioned by a faint ray that awakens the sleeper into a state of madness. Along this narrow beam of light descends a row of bright dots "with dreadful meaningful intervals between them" (16). We shall see that sanity ultimately reestablishes itself in a similar fashion (250). The most peculiar manifestation of the writer's madness is his inability to visualize left/right reversals. The problem is entirely psychological, for VV is physically able to reverse his tracks and the corresponding vista without difficulty. It is the mental effort of imagining the left/right reversal of vista,

accompanying any such about-face that induces acute stress. He likens the effort of such mental inversions to trying to shift the world on its axis (236). Although his disability has no practical consequence, he is so obsessed that he feels honor bound to confess it—to the exclusion of the seemingly more serious aspects of his illness—to each of his four brides-to-be.

Vadim Vadimovich's psychological malaise is rooted in his troubled sense of dual identity. He is haunted by the feeling that he is a pale shadow, an inferior variant, of another vastly more gifted Anglo-Russian writer (89). On one level, the plot of LATH consists of an accumulation of evidence that this is so. Although the ultimate prototype is, of course, Nabokov himself, it is important to understand that the "other" author is a Nabokovian persona (and *not* Nabokov, the author of *Lolita* and LATH), who is the shadowy original of whom VV is the flawed copy. The reader must regard the narrator's statements with suspicion, for VV is yet another example of Nabokov's use of the unreliable narrator. A telling example occurs in the narrator's contradictory statements about his father. Early in the narrative VV notes that he was raised by a grand-aunt (upon whose reality he immediately casts doubt) and saw his parents only "infrequently" (8). This "infrequently" may be a considerable overstatement, for later VV avers that his father, Vadim, died in a duel some six months before the narrator's birth in 1899. Such contradictions (quite apart from the previous insinuation that Count Starov is VV's father) must lead us to question the veracity of the whole of the narrator's account of his life.

The narrator's name remains obscure throughout his autobiography. In a London psychiatrist's account of his case, the patient is identified as "Mr. N., a Russian nobleman," although, to VV's intense irritation, the doctor lumps his case history with that of "another" patient, a Mr. V.S., who the reader might reasonably associate with Nabokov's Russian pen name, Vladimir Sirin (15). At a later point the tipsy narrator rhetorically addresses himself as Prince Vadim Blonsky, but shortly thereafter disavows the surname (232, 249). His Cambridge friend Ivor Black, once refers to him as "McNab" and on a later occasion as "Vivian" (7, 43)—the latter evoking Nabokov's own sometime anagrammatic pen names Vivian Calmbrood and Vivian Darkbloom.

The narrator's unease about his name and identity is, of course, symptomatic of his aberrant mental condition which *au fond* seems to partake more of schizophrenia than dementia paralytica. Even the most casual reader will have noted that most of VV's books, in title, content, and serial order, are transparent variants and blends of Nabokov's own novels. For example, Nabokov's *Kamera obskura* which becomes *Laughter in the Dark* in English obviously underlies the mad narrator's *Camera Lucida* and its English counterpart *Slaughter in the Sun*. It is VV's unseen and nameless double who is obviously the source of the narrator's intuition that his life is a "non-identical twin, a parody." He feels that a demon is forcing him "to impersonate that other man, that other writer who was and would always be incomparably

greater, healthier, and crueler than your obedient servant" (89). This feeling is reinforced in VV's conversation with the Russian book dealer, Oksman, who welcomes the author of *Camera Lucida* to his shop as the author of *Camera Obscura* and then again blunders by confusing VV's *Tamara* with a book called *Mary* (92, 94). To make matters yet worse, the amiable bookseller reminisces that he twice saw the narrator's father, a prominent liberal member of the first Russian Parliament. On one occasion he was at the opera with his wife and two small boys, and, once again, later, at a public meeting where his English *sangfroid* and absence of gesture was in sharp contrast to that of more flamboyant orators (95). (Opera was a passion of Nabokov's politician father.) These recollections from the period between 1905 and 1917 postdate the asserted 1898 death of VV's "father." Oksman, like the other characters outside Count Starov's orbit, is party to a widespread confusion of the narrator with another, unnamed Russian novelist. This so intensifies VV's lurking dread that he "might be permanently impersonating somebody living as a real being beyond the constellation of my tears and asterisks . . ." that he contemplates repatterning his entire existence: abandoning his art, taking up chess, becoming a lepidopterist, or making a scholarly Russian translation of *Paradise Lost* (96–97). Realizing, however, that only his fiction, the "endless re-creation of my fluid self," keeps him "more or less" sane, he finally contents himself with dropping his *nom de plume*, V. Irisin, in favor of his real (but unrevealed) name. V. Irisin, of course, evokes Nabokov's Russian language pseudonym, V. Sirin, the initials of which we remarked in the London psychiatrist's report.

In spite of this shift from pseudonym to real name, the narrator continues to be plagued by his shadowy nemesis. Some dozen years later while traveling in the American Far West, VV is overcome by a "dream sensation of having come empty-handed—without what? A gun? A wand? This I dared not probe lest I wound the raw fell under my thin identity" (156). The same page also contains an oblique reference to butterflies, and it is obviously a butterfly net that VV's empty hand longs to enclasp. The wonder-working wand is also, however, the omnipresent symbol of the autobiography's title motif, the harlequin, the madcap prankster of the *commedia dell'arte*—another of the images of Vadim's mysterious double, the persona of lepidopterist Nabokov. The harlequin relates to the novel's theme in various ways, but most obviously it is a metaphor for art.[14]

Vadim Vadimovich's sense of duality persists nearly to the end of the narrative, even manifesting itself at a particularly radiant moment shortly after he has moved to Switzerland with his last love. The seventy-one-year-old author has just completed his final novel *Ardis* and is contemplating a proposal of marriage. Before doing so, he must once again confess his strange inability to mentally reverse left and right. To accomplish this painful chore he hits upon the idea of giving "you" a manuscript chapter from *Ardis* in which the hero describes his own (and Vadim's) aberration. While his love reads the

"confession," VV goes for a preprandial stroll. As he walks, he mentally reads along with "you," line by line relishing the prose and her pleasure. He is in a rare euphoric state that nothing can mar, not even, he says, the "hideous suspicion that even *Ardis*, my most private book, soaked in reality, saturated with sun flecks, might be an unconscious imitation of another's unearthly art, *that* suspicion might come later" (234). And indeed it does. VV reaches the far end of his stroll and stands before a low parapet gazing at the setting sun. As he attempts to turn about and retrace his steps, he finds that he cannot: "To make that movement would mean rolling the world around on its axis . . ." (236). VV's psychological inability has become a physical reality.

VV awakens in a hospital, his mind racing but his body and senses all but lifeless. As he slowly gathers his thoughts, he first tries to establish his own identity. He is fairly certain his first name cum patronymic is Vadim Vadimovich, but is troubled by the thought that in rapid speech the name "Vladimir Vladimirovich" degenerates into something very like Vadim Vadimych (the slurred form of Vadim Vadimovich). Of his family name the narrator is at first certain only that it contains the letters N and B. After trying and rejecting several possibilities such as Nebesny, Nabedrin, Nablidze, Naborcroft, Bonidze, and Blonsky, his "sonorous surname" finally bursts into his consciousness (248–49).

The questions of identity and reality are closely coupled. The theme of "reality" in LATH is, in turn, identified with VV's nameless fourth love. The narrator even declines to identify her or speak of their relationship for fear that it would contaminate "the reality of your radiance." "Yet," he writes, "'reality' *is* the key word here; and the gradual perception of that reality was nearly fatal to me" (226). As the reader knows, it was just as VV wishes to go back to "you" with his proposal of marriage that his near-fatal seizure occurs. As VV emerges from his death-like coma and at last recalls his surname, the door of his hospital room opens and he becomes aware of "a slow, infinitely slow sequence of suspension dots in diamond type. I emitted a bellow of joy, and Reality entered" (250). Reality in the person of VV's ideal love, "you," has entered the room.

The identity of the narrator is that of the nameless "other" author, the prototype of which VV is a pallid, flawed copy. The identity of this original has long been available to the reader. It has remained secret only to the narrator who has vaguely sensed, but not known, the truth. During VV's mysterious paralysis, his speeding mind has attained certain insights from its brief intimacy with non-being and "Problems of identity have been, if not settled, at least set" (239). Vadim Vadimovich is now consciously aware of both halves of his schizoid being. "Vadim Vadimovich" and "Vladimir Vladimirovich," mad and sane, left and right, have been reintegrated. If we adopt this interpretation, and it seems fully warranted, a new question poses itself. The narrator is now whole and between his seventy-first and seventy-fourth years composes LATH. This "autobiography" is, however, patently fantastic. If VV

is no longer mad, why does he write a largely fantastical autobiography? There would seem to be but one perspective from which the pieces fall into place. LATH is an account of the *delusional* world of the narrator during his existence as "Vadim Vadimovich," told entirely and consistently from that point of view. It is VV's life within "the constellation of . . . *tears* and *aster*isks" that betokens the phantasmagoric familial galaxy of Count Starov (96–97, my emphasis).

In the fictional universe of Nabokov's LATH, there exists a shadowy Nabokovian persona who shares some, but far from all, of the biographical background of the real, extra-fictional Nabokov and who has written a series of books—*Mary*, *Camera Obscura*, *The Gift*, *Lolita*, *Ada*, etc. He is not, however, to be confused with the real Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov. This Nabokovian persona, whom we provisionally term "Vladimir Vladimirovich," suffers from periods of schizophrenia in which he thinks himself to be "Vadim Vadimovich," the author of *Tamara*, *Camera Lucida*, *The Dare*, *A Kingdom by the Sea*, *Ardis*, etc. None of the latter exist outside the mind of the mad narrator. They are simply distorted variants of the real works written by the sane half of the narrator's personality—"Vladimir Vladimirovich." Vadim has unconsciously concocted a patchwork, harlequinesque biography for himself out of bits and pieces from the life and works of "Vladimir Vladimirovich." The "real" characters in LATH, i.e., those not part of Count Starov's brood, know of the narrator's split identity. The Stepanovs, for example, with whom VV stays after one of his breakdowns, refer to him as mad (87–88). Oksman, the book dealer, also knows this and humors VV by pretending that his reference to *Camera Lucida* as *Camera Obscura* is a slip of the tongue (92–93).

Vadim's wives and lovers (with the exception of the last) are no more real than his books. The unreality of this aspect of Vadim's life is attested by the gross improbability that the multifarious bastards of the mythical Count Starov meet, mate, and murder. Still more implausible is that their diverse names all include the emblematic "BL." The almost ritualistic patterning in the presentation of the women is strikingly artificial. With minor variations, three events must precede each new relationship. The obligatory butterfly must appear (34, 108–109, 226). There must be a scene in which the nude VV stands before a mirror taking stock before making his declarations to his future brides (31, 174, 227). Finally, there is the bizarre left/right confession that assumes a modicum of meaning only within the context of the narrator's schizophrenic dual identities (39–42, 104–107, 178–179, 231).

All this bespeaks the artifice of art rather than the chaos of reality or even fictional realism. Vadim's "autobiography" is so neatly patterned because it never happened. It is an account of the imaginary, solipsistic universe Vadim (or his Muse Dementia) imposes upon the ordinary world of the "real" characters. That world dissolves with the advent of "Reality," embodied in the beloved woman that Vadim/Vladimir refuses to name. Through her, Vadim Vadimovich at lasts escapes the inbred, solipsistic universe of the self.

Love and artistic creation are the only transcendent realities and forever remain personal mysteries, impenetrable to outsiders. We have posited this as the central theme of LATH, which, like many of Nabokov's novels, is dedicated to his wife, Véra. Conclusive evidence is presented by Nabokov's biographer, Brian Boyd, who has shown that LATH's title is in fact a hidden allusion to the first meeting of Nabokov and Véra, his wife of fifty-two years—an event that neither would ever speak of.[15] Although Nabokov's *Look at the Harlequins!* is not among his finest works, it is a fitting summation to one of the most brilliant literary careers of the twentieth century.

D. Barton Johnson

Notes

1. Boyd, 1991, pp. 605–6, 614.
2. Ibid., p. 642.
3. Amis, pp. 555–56; Korn, p. 417; Poirer, pp. 2–4; Pritchett, 1974, p. 3; Raban, p. 81; Skow, pp. 112, 116; Stegner, 1974, pp. 98–104; Updike, 1974, pp. 209–12.
4. Hyde, pp. 217–18; Rampton, 1984, p. 176.
5. Grabes, 1977, pp. 106–31; Patteson, "Nabokov's *Look at the Harlequins!*"
6. Maddox, pp. 142–59.
7. Paul Bruss, 1982, pp. 301–306.
8. Grabes, 1993; Fraysse.
9. Couturier, 1981, pp. 165–79.
10. Green and Swan, pp. 232–41.
11. Machu, pp. 246–56.
12. Proffer, "Things about . . . ," pp. 295–301; D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 170–84.
13. D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 135–53.
14. Grabes, 1977, pp. 120–25; Green and Swan, pp. 232–41.
15. Boyd, 1992, pp. 28–36.

MANUSCRIPTS

Writing on *Eugene Onegin,* Nabokov argued that a work of art should be known only in its fixed and final form: "Rough drafts, false scents, half-explored trails, dead ends of inspiration, are of little intrinsic importance. An artist should ruthlessly destroy his manuscripts after publication, lest they mislead academic mediocrities into thinking that it is possible to unravel the mysteries of genius by studying canceled readings. In art, purpose and plan are nothing; only the result counts."[1] But at the same time he and those around him—his mother, his wife, his son—knew the importance of his own work and hoarded it lovingly. Despite the upheavals of history, therefore, despite the

sudden flights of Nabokov and his family from Petrograd, Yalta and wartime Paris, his manuscripts have for the most part been meticulously preserved.

In his teens and early twenties, Nabokov kept his poems (written in ink, mostly fair copies, or if drafts, with very little revision) in notebooks and albums. His verse albums, ten in all, begin on 1/14 August 1917 and run without a break through October 1923. Nabokov's father's librarian had typed out more than a hundred pages of his poems between those published for *Stikhi* in June 1916 and the October Revolution. From the family's arrival in the Crimea at the end of 1917 until 1931, Nabokov's mother took up the task of recopying by hand much of her son's work into albums of her own, sometimes alongside the work of other poets. Occasionally she would paste into her albums Nabokov's own fair-copy manuscripts, one of a poem he retrospectively dated "summer 1914," which if the date is correct is the earliest surviving manuscript. Elena Nabokov's albums from 1923 to 1931 are particularly valuable, as they include Véra Slonim-Nabokov's lengthy typescripts, corrected in Nabokov's hand, of works like the stories "Udar kryla" ("Wingbeat"), "Venetsianka" ("Venetian Lady") and the play *Chelovek iz SSSR* (*The Man from the USSR*), preserved in no other versions.

Nabokov's mother kept her son's early verse albums in Prague along with her own albums of transcripts, manuscripts, typescripts and clippings. When Nabokov returned to Europe in the early 1960s, Georges Thorgevsky brought him these papers from Nabokov's sister Olga Petkevich, still living in their mother's old apartment in Prague.[2] These materials remained part of the Montreux archive until its sale to the New York Public Library in 1991.

In 1923 in Berlin Vladimir Nabokov met Véra Slonim. Like Zina Mertz in *The Gift* before she meets Fyodor in person, Véra had been collecting clippings of "Sirin's" verse as it appeared in *Rul'* and elsewhere. Now at the end of 1923 she began to type his manuscripts, keeping for his files a copy in the purplish carbon available at the time. After their marriage in 1925, she continued to act as typist, editor, business secretary, and archivist, maintaining a valuable file of clippings and reviews of Nabokov's works throughout the émigré years.

Until 1940 Nabokov continued to write his fiction, verse, and drama almost invariably in pen, usually on loose-leaf foolscap sheets, occasionally in notebooks. He revised heavily, sometimes recopying the whole manuscript in fair copy, sometimes simply reworking his text on the original manuscript to the point of near-illegibility, before dictating to Véra at the typewriter.[3] As far as can be seen from the surviving manuscripts (though of course he may have destroyed earlier drafts), he still wrote in sequential order, at least until *Dar* (*The Gift*) required that he first tackle Fyodor's Life of Chernyshevsky (chapter 4) and Fyodor's verse before writing the remainder of the novel more or less in sequence.

When he and his family fled the German advance in May 1940, Nabokov left his manuscripts and books, except for his still unpublished work—*The Gift*

(the lengthy Chernyshevsky chapter was still unpublished), "The Enchanter," "Ultima Thule" and his first novel in English, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*—with his friend Ilya Fondaminsky in Paris. On the day Fondaminsky was taken to the concentration camp where he died, his apartment was ransacked, and Nabokov's papers strewn in the street. Though some were destroyed, most were salvaged by Fondaminsky's niece. After the war, Nabokov set about the difficult business of retrieving them and had all that survived back in his possession by early 1950.[4]

Meanwhile, in New York, Stanford, Wellesley, Cambridge, and Ithaca, Nabokov was accumulating manuscripts in his new language, English, and in his new professions, as lepidopterist and university professor. He wrote *Bend Sinister*, begun in 1941, in his old way, in ink, in sequence, but during the 1940s as he began to use index cards for his lepidoptera work—filing his notes and his diagrams of butterfly genitalia and measurements—he saw the advantages of composing on them for his literary work. Since he saw a novel entire, and planned it in minute detail before beginning to write it out, he could, as he often explained, write in any order, not necessarily from start to finish. Index cards offered a perfect way of inserting the day's output into their preassigned places in the final sequence.

For *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov still wrote on sheets of paper, perhaps because for that book every chapter's structure and details were eidetically clear in his mind. Nevertheless, the final text was still agony to write, as can be seen by an unusually large number of early drafts preserved for some chapters, sometimes in pencil, sometimes in ink, and sometimes pencil or ink addenda to sheets partly typewritten by Véra. For *Lolita* (composed 1950–1953) Nabokov had been using index cards—still mostly in ink—to gather material for the America he had to invent: details of furniture, firearms, phrases, and fads.[5] As he wrote the novel, he began to compose on index cards. A stack of them became a miniature writing table as he sat in the quiet back seat of the car outside rooms in noisy motels during breaks in his butterfly hunting. Summers, after all, were almost the only season while he was teaching at Cornell when he could find long stretches of time to write.

Apprehensive about the consequences for Cornell if he published *Lolita* under his own name, Nabokov wanted to publish the novel anonymously, and feared the text could fall into the wrong hands before publication. After dictating his fair-copy version to Véra, he would screw up each card and throw it into the fireplace in this or that hotel on their butterfly travels around the US (some obsessive collector or manuscript dealer may like to start a paper chase with even less chance of success than Humbert's pursuit of Quilty). If the manuscript seems untraceable, the typescripts are untraced, whether because of Nabokov's anxiety about security, or because copies were read by several American publishers before Nabokov found he had to resort to Olympia Press in Paris, or because it was at precisely this time that he wrote that denunciation of manuscripts with which I began. That last possibility could perhaps account

for the fact that for *Pnin*, also written at the time Nabokov was working on his introduction to *Eugene Onegin*, no manuscript has been found.[6]

Yet the partial manuscript, complete typescript, and corrected galleys of the *Eugene Onegin* translation, along with editorial correspondence about the volume, occupy five archive boxes in the Library of Congress Nabokov collection, more space than is taken up by all the manuscripts of the novels Nabokov had written up to his departure from the US in 1959. Why the sudden change, the sudden urge to keep every scrap? In 1958 Nabokov was approached by the Library of Congress. If he donated his papers to the library, he would receive substantial tax concessions. Since *Lolita* was about to become a best-seller, and he would have to pay a tax bill much larger than his entire income from his best previous year, he readily agreed. He sent the first instalment of his manuscripts—most of the Russian novels and stories salvaged from the ransacking of Fondaminsky's apartment, and manuscripts of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, *Bend Sinister*, and *Drugie berega* (the Russian version of *Conclusive Evidence*)—in December 1958.[7] Despite attempts by the library to change his mind, he insisted on a fifty-year restriction on access to the papers. He continued to send more material until the mid-1960s.

When the Nabokovs traveled to Europe in 1959, they did not intend to quit America, and stored their papers with Dean of Ithaca until their return. Nabokov was back in the US in 1960, to write the *Lolita* screenplay, whose manuscript—on index cards, in pencil—he sent to the Library of Congress, as he sent a year later, but now from Montreux, the 1075 pencilled index cards for *Pale Fire*.

Once Nabokov was embroiled in *Ada*, it became clear that a move from Montreux was unlikely. His business correspondence, still handled by Véra, was voluminous; reviews and newspaper references seemed innumerable; copies of his books were accumulating in dozens of languages; material that had been in his mother's keeping, including Nabokov's letters to his parents, and an album of memorabilia relating to his father, had arrived from Prague; and Nabokov was now preserving not only his manuscripts but typescripts, galleys, page proofs, and tearsheets. In the late 1960s, accepting that he could not move, Nabokov had his remaining papers in storage in Ithaca shipped to Montreux. There he employed Jaqueline Callier, who had typed the fair copy of *Ada* and would type all his remaining material for publication, to file the reviews (Véra had been unable to keep up with the material piling up since 1960), all the correspondence dating back to the 1940s, and the copies of books by Nabokov.[8]

Fourteen years after Nabokov's death, in 1991, the Montreux archive was sold to the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library.[9] It should be catalogued and available to scholars (except for unpublished Russian material) by the end of 1993. The Nabokov Archive in the Berg Collection includes: 1) the manuscripts of Nabokov's last novels, *Ada* and after, the revised *Speak,*

Memory, all the books he prepared for McGraw-Hill (*Strong Opinions*, *Poems and Problems*, the translations of the early Russian novels, the stories), and the material from which the three volumes of lectures were drawn; 2) Nabokov's and his mother's early albums, which contain hundreds of unpublished early poems, and occasional unpublished talks from the late 1920s or early 1930s (in his last two years, Nabokov reread all the verse in these albums and in his published collections and marked a red cross beside each poem he wished to include in the 1979 Ardis *Stikhi*); 3) folders of loose manuscripts of verse (almost all published) and fragmentary prose pieces from the late 1920s and 1930s; 4) several large boxes of unpublished index card materials, mostly of lepidopterological research in the 1940s or preparations for the uncompleted *Butterflies of Europe* of the early 1960s, but also including literary material such as a few early notes and scraps for *Pale Fire*, material gathered for *Ada*, especially the "Texture of Time" section, a few notes for *Speak on, Memory*; 5) Nabokov's diaries (mostly agenda books) for 1943 and 1947–77; 6) Nabokov's letters to his parents and his wife, and thousands of carbons of letters to others, a few from the 1930s, more from the early 1940s, and almost all Nabokov's correspondence from the late 1940s, when Véra began to type up and keep carbons of even most of her husband's personal letters. Nabokov's annotated books are also expected to become part of the Berg Collection.[10]

Since the papers in the Library of Congress Nabokov collection were somewhat arbitrarily arranged and catalogued by someone with little knowledge of Nabokov's works, I prepared in 1980 a checklist for the Library and for Véra Nabokov which was then published.[11] Although a restriction still applies on the Library of Congress papers, there is unrestricted Nabokov material in other collections in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress and in libraries and archives throughout the United States (see Boyd, 1991, pp. 732–35, for a list of collections). Almost all of this material consists of Nabokov correspondence, but those interested in the unpublished sixteenth chapter of *Speak, Memory* should note that it can be consulted from a copy in the Katharine White collection in the Bryn Mawr College Library.

A few general comments on Nabokov's manuscripts. Nabokov's handwriting is normally very legible, both in English and in Russian, though spelling can become erratic and final letters flatten out when he writes at speed—which, since most of the manuscripts are fair copies or the fruit of painstaking composition, is rarely the case outside his lectures.[12] Dating is rarely a problem. From the start he has tended to date his manuscripts, except inconclusive early drafts. (In the case of the poem "Pale Fire," the first new literary work he composed after the Library of Congress first asked him for his manuscripts, he actually dated every index card.) Where Nabokov has retrospectively dated a manuscript, however, his date should be accepted as often enlightened guesswork rather than memory. Until a complete inventory of

Nabokov manuscripts is drawn up, it should be kept in mind that a single work may be represented in two different places: the *Lolita* screenplay index cards are in the Library of Congress, the long and short versions of the typescript in the New York Public Library; the *Pale Fire* manuscript in Washington, some of the index cards notes assembled for the novel in New York, and so on.

Of most interest to scholars will be the unpublished material, especially the sixteenth chapter of *Conclusive Evidence*, the two additions to *The Gift* (one should be published by 1995), the five-act *Tragedy of Mr. Morn* (all at the Library of Congress) and the early poems, talks for the Aikhenval'd circle in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Cornell lectures on Russian poetry, notes for *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, *Ada*, and *Speak on, Memory*, the substantial parts of the *Lolita* screenplay cut for the published version, and the correspondence and diaries (almost all in the New York Public Library). Scholars should remember that access to the physical text does not constitute a right to publish unpublished materials, even in part; the copyright for all unpublished Nabokov material remains with the Vladimir Nabokov Estate. Dmitri Nabokov plans to continue publishing his father's untranslated, uncollected, or unpublished material as fast as he can translate and edit.

Also of particular interest to scholars will be the manuscripts of published fiction, drama, and verse. Because access has been restricted, these manuscripts have been little studied from a textual point of view, and it is unclear how much information they will furnish. Nabokov's surviving manuscripts are mostly fair copies, and may well be advanced drafts even when they bear the marks of substantial revision. The palimpsestic nature of the heavily-revised manuscripts of some of the Russian novels may yield a great deal, though not easily; the erasures and heavy deletions on the index-card manuscripts written in pencil (from the *Lolita* screenplay on) will thwart easy decipherment.

While scholars may feel frustrated at the restrictions on access to the Library of Congress materials, it should be pointed out that the published Nabokov canon is vast, complex, and still expanding, that there are many revealing uncollected published works available with effort, and that the texts of Nabokov's works, especially in the Vintage editions, are, if not perfect, very accurate indeed. Moreover, with the chronology of Nabokov's working life now established, the most urgent task at present seems not to consult the Library of Congress's mainly fair copy texts or even to study the juvenilia or pore through the notes and tens of thousands of pages of correspondence at the New York Public Library in the hope of finding a fact or two to clinch an argument, but to annotate texts already published, the sort of work already undertaken by Alfred Appel, Jr., and Gennady Barabtarlo for *Lolita* and *Pnin*, and underway in Germany (for Dieter Zimmer's invaluable 23-volume edition), France (for the three-volume Pléiade) and Russia (Alexander Dolinin's notes for *Dar*, the Russian *Lolita* and other texts).

Brian Boyd

NOTES

1. Nabokov, *Eugene Onegin,* I, p. 15.
2. Dmitri Nabokov to Brian Boyd, February 28, 1993.
3. See the opening page of *Priglashenie na kazn'* (*Invitation to a Beheading*) reproduced in Boyd, 1990, between pp. 446–47.
4. *SL* 271; unpublished Véra Nabokov letter to Elena Sikorski, January 21, 1946, Elena Sikorski collection.
5. See reproductions of four cards apiece in Parker, 1982, pp. 190–91, and in Boyd, 1991, between pp. 226 and 227.
6. *Pnin* was apparently not written on index cards, and Nabokov had no memory of destroying the manuscript (*SL* 271).
7. Véra Nabokov's record of the material sent in this first batch has been published in Véra Nabokov, "Material Given to the Library of Congress," pp. 17–21.
8. Two years after her husband's death Véra Nabokov asked me to catalogue the Montreux archive, for her own use and for prospective purchasers. This I did from time to time between 1979 and 1981.
9. See Dmitri Nabokov, 1992, and Boyd, 1992.
10. See Goldwasser.
11. Boyd, 1980. Item 7e should read not "draft of uncompleted story" but "draft of 'Draka' ('The Fight')."
12. The most extended sample of Nabokov manuscript published to date is the 147-page *Lectures on* Ulysses. Scholars may like to compare the text here with the edited version in *Lectures on Literature.* Samples of Nabokov's manuscripts for his lectures—which of course look rather different from his literary manuscripts—are reproduced in the three edited volumes of Nabokov's Cornell lectures (*Lectures on Literature, Lectures on Russian Literature, Lectures on* Don Quixote). Samples of Nabokov's literary and butterfly manuscripts and notes are reproduced in Parker, 1982; Boyd, 1990, 1991, 1992; Dmitri Nabokov, 1992.

MARY

Up to the summer of 1925 Vladimir Nabokov, by then twenty-six, had written a host of poems which later in his life he was to deem mediocre, a small number of book reviews and essays, and about twenty short stories in which he was slowly groping toward his own personal style and less than half of which he was to consider good enough to merit inclusion in one of his later collections. *Mary* was his first novel. Slim as it is, it might more appropriately be termed a novella. The title of the Russian original was *Mashen'ka.* (In order to accommodate the English reader said to be easily put off by foreign words, Nabokov sometimes, if rarely, translated even proper names. Mashen'ka is the common Russian diminutive of Mariia.)

Much later, Nabokov remembered *Mary* as having been written in the spring of 1925, right after his wedding to Véra Slonim, which took place on

April 15. From the evidence of the manuscript and the letters Nabokov wrote to his mother, Nabokov's biographer Brian Boyd argues that *Mary* may well have been planned in the spring of 1925 but was not composed until the fall of that year. The first draft was completed by the end of October, and revision took place in November.[1] The book was out on March 21, 1926,[2] and in general was warmly, but not enthusiastically greeted by émigré book reviewers who read it as a truthful description of the émigré milieu.[3]

The English version of *Mary* was published in 1970. It was the eighth of Nabokov's nine Russian novels to be translated into English. Contrary to Carl Proffer's prophecy,[4] Nabokov did not take the opportunity to alter his 45-year-old book. "There are no significant deviations from the Russian text," as Jane Grayson noted in her book on Nabokov's self-translations.[5] Reworking a draft made by Michael Glenny, Nabokov corrected errors and wrought many changes. However, unlike the case of *King, Queen, Knave* or *Despair*, these were not designed to revise the original but on the contrary "to bring the English closer to the original in meaning and in style [. . .] to make it more completely his own."[6]

What Nabokov contemplated writing early in 1925 seems to have been a novel called *Schast'e* (*Happiness*). One chapter of it, entitled "Pis'mo v Rossiiu" ("A Letter That Never Reached Russia"), was composed and published in January as a separate story, and Boyd doubts that more of *Happiness* was ever written.[7] However, Nabokov retained *Happiness* as the working title of the new novel, and one may surmise that there were close ties between the old project and the new one, or that *Mary* actually was the form the old project finally took after a good deal of deliberation during the spring and summer of 1925.

It is therefore fitting to turn briefly to the story for the light it might shed on the novel. The seven-page piece comes in the guise of a love letter, written by a young Russian exile in an unnamed city easily recognizable as Berlin. He explicitly says he is a writer (like Nabokov but unlike Ganin, the protagonist in *Mary*) and that (unlike Nabokov but like Ganin) he will soon travel on to sunny countries. The addressee is a young woman in Russia with whom the letter's author had had a love affair eight years ago that, to judge from the sparse details given in the first paragraph, is virtually undistinguishable from the one with the "Mary" of the novel and the "Tamara" of *Speak, Memory*.

There are two surprising things about this letter. One is that it does not contain a word about those "important" matters (politics, exile, the times in general) that one would expect in a missive like this. The other is that its author does not at all seem to be pining for the love and the country he has lost. Instead, he is carefully describing a few pointedly "irrelevant" details he has observed during a nocturnal walk through the city of Berlin and the suicide of an old Russian widow in the Russian cemetery some time ago. At the end, he seemingly inconsequentially professes to feel a thorough, imperishable happiness. There is nothing in the events and circumstances related in the story that leads up to this conclusion. The reader is left to guess what it might be that

causes the author such bliss. The most likely reason is that he has successfully divorced himself from his Russian past while still cherishing memories of it, but now has turned all his attention to the minutiae of the gray city that surrounds him and to thoughts of the sunnier countries that he will soon visit.

This, however, is exactly what in a more explicit way *Mary* is about. The novel, too, is a farewell to a young man's Russian past, a gesture that frees him to face the present and to envisage a future.

Unlike Nabokov's later fiction, *Mary* has a simple and compact plot. The time is April 1924. The novel recounts a week in the life of seven Russian émigrés that chance has united in a drab Berlin boarding house (including the meek landlady who is the Russian widow of a German). "Boarding house" might be a misnomer. The *Pensionen* of this type that sprouted in Berlin after World War I were simply big rented apartments which their tenants, impoverished by the war and its aftermath, could not pay for any more. To make ends meet, they had to take in lodgers. If somebody had to rent out most of his rooms and could supply his lodgers with a semblance of regular meals, he would call it a *Pension*. This one is situated in Berlin's Charlottenburg district, right by the tracks of the *Stadtbahn* (the city railway not yet electrified in 1924) that traverses the town from east to west. Its noises keep rumbling through the book, reminding boarders and readers of how the Russians had arrived here a short while ago and how they might have to leave any time. From February to August 1924, Nabokov himself had lived in two Berlin *Pensionen*, none of them located by the railway tracks. At the time he wrote *Mary*, he and his wife had moved into two rented rooms in the apartment of somebody dealing in canned food and then again into that of a single lady of unknown status. He supported himself by tutoring two boys from a wealthy Jewish family.

A Russian *Pension* in Berlin was nothing unusual in 1924. When the war had ended, refugees from the Russian Revolution began to flock into the German capital. In order not to leave the teeming intellectual life of Russian Berlin to the émigrés, Soviet Russia encouraged many writers and artists sympathetic to the new regime, or as yet undecided about it, to join them. At the height of this development, between 1921 and 1923, Berlin can be said to have been the intellectual capital of Russia. By 1920, the count was 70,000 Russians. By 1921, there were 100,000. By 1923, their number had risen to 360,000.[8] They were mostly businessmen and professionals, civil servants, military men, aristocrats, and a great number of scientists, artists, and writers, many of the more indigent ones now working as factory hands, janitors, taxi drivers, barbers, tailors, or extras in Berlin's booming film industry (as poignantly described in *Mary*). In 1924, there were 86 Russian publishing houses and book stores in Berlin,[9] and through the twenties 150 Russian newspapers, journals, and almanachs appeared, many of them short-lived.[10] The most influential Russian daily was *Rul'*, connected to the German Ullstein Press and co-founded by Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov. *Rul'* printed most of his son's early poetry and prose. One of the most important

Russian publishing houses was *Slovo* (*The Word*), also connected to Ullstein, which published Nabokov's first four books. Through the ties with Ullstein, the first translations of Nabokov's works were German ones. In 1928, Ullstein brought out *Mashen'ka* in its popular and slightly seedy yellow paperback series under the curious title *Sie kommt—kommt sie?* (*She will come—will she come?*).

As much as the presence of Russian journals, publishing houses, book stores, theatres, cabarets and literary societies may have attracted more and more Russian intellectuals to Berlin, the majority of the refugees certainly had not come because of the promise of a rich intellectual life. They had come because Berlin simply was the nearest big city of central Europe, one moreover with a long history of close ties to Russia, and because before and during the inflation of 1922/23 Berlin was a cheap place to live in—a few jewels or foreign bank notes could take one a long way. At the end of 1923, they started to leave, a few deciding to return to Russia, most of them opting for definite exile farther west. By 1927, the capital of the emigration had shifted to Paris. *Mary* is set at a moment when this westward move had just begun. It is quite characteristic that two of the seven people in the *Pension*, young Ganin and the old poet Podtyagin, are thinking of moving on to France.

Though living in the country for nearly sixteen years, Nabokov had little interest in German affairs, hardly any contacts with German people, and did not read German books or papers. The main reason, so he has explained, was that at the time he had a panicky fear of damaging his Russian (*SO* 189). But in this respect Nabokov was in no way an exception. The Russian expatriates had not come of their own free will or because they had a special liking for Germany. In consequence they kept to themselves, and vice versa the Germans took little notice of the refugee community in their midst. This lent a ghost-like quality to the life of the Russians of which Nabokov was well aware—they had to make themselves tentatively at home in a strange city that did not notice them. The contacts between Russians and Germans were largely restricted to nasty situations at the police headquarters where foreigners had to apply for residency permits and exit visas which incomprehensible German officials were reluctant to issue. Nabokov's cousin, the composer Nicolas Nabokov, who at the time was studying with Ferrucio Busoni in Berlin, has aptly described this state of affairs: "Somewhat puzzled, in the beginning in no way unfriendly and partly even rather helpful, the Berliners went about their daily business, ignoring the invasion from the east; it was hard enough for them to cope with their own problems, the economy collapsing and the inflation a-gallop . . . strange as it may seem, there were only few Russian writers, poets or musicians that had any interest in the cultural life of Germany."[11] Andrei Bely who came to Berlin in 1921 and returned to Russia in 1923 has written a witty comment on "Russian Berlin" during the early twenties: "In this part of Berlin you meet people you have not met for years, not to mention your acquaintances; you meet all of Moscow and all of Piter [Petersburg], Russian Paris, Prague, even Sofia and Belgrade; I suppose we too have met in this

hothouse of yesterday's Russian culture; [. . .] And if it happens you hear German spoken, you are perplexed: How's that? Germans? What business do they have in 'our' city?"[12]

All of this is in *Mary*, implicitly or explicitly. There are no Germans in the novel, except for the landlady's stout cook who goes off to work as a prostitute on weekends. As in most of his later stories and novels set in Berlin, Nabokov confined himself to the émigré colony there. Robert C. Williams has surmised that Nabokov stayed in a country that he, like the hero of *The Gift*, found "as oppressive as a headache," precisely because it afforded him the solitude he needed for his work.[13]

Yet paradoxical as it may seem, the writer who cared so little for Berlin, and with the rise of the Nazi movement came to hate it outright, is probably the one who has left us the most vivid and even endearing literary picture of Berlin in the twenties and early thirties—more exactly of its western parts, not the proletarian northeastern quarters of Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, of its streets, its gray apartment houses and bourgeois villas, its skies, its light, its parks and gardens, the pines and lakes of the Grunewald, its shops, *pissoirs*, streetcars, and subways. It is a picture of its outside, so to speak, practically devoid of Berliners except for what a foreigner might chance to glimpse of their lives, but this outside is preserved as carefully and lovingly as a child may preserve the impressions of her childhood. This at least is the program Nabokov formulated at the end of the story "A Guide to Berlin" (written after *Mary* in 1925) after having embodied it in the novel and in the story "A Letter That Never Reached Russia": "I think that here lies the sense of literary creation: to portray ordinary objects as they will be reflected in the kindly mirrors of future times; to find in the objects around us the fragrant tenderness that only posterity will discern and appreciate in the far-off times when every trifle of our plain everyday life will become exquisite and festive in its own right."[14]

The character the novel focuses upon is young Lev Ganin. Though it is never stated, the reader perceives most of the narrative through Ganin's eyes. This is felt most clearly in the way Ganin's neighbor Aleksey Alfyorov is treated. Talkative Alfyorov surely has told everybody about his Russian background, but as Ganin has a strong dislike for him and dreads to listen to his stories, Alfyorov remains suspiciously inscrutable to the reader. In the opening scene, on Sunday, Ganin is stalled in the elevator with Alfyorov who excitedly tells him that next Saturday he is expecting his wife who finally has received permission to leave Russia. On Monday, Alfyorov shows Ganin her photograph, and the latter discovers that she is no other than Mary (Mashenka), the girl he himself had loved nine years ago. On Tuesday morning, after a night of wandering around Berlin (like the protagonist of "A Letter That Never Reached Russia"), Ganin musters his courage to take leave of his current sweetheart, and on his way home begins to think of the time when he and Mary had met, soon discovering that "he was a god, re-creating a world that had

perished" (33). This occupies him through Thursday. On Friday, he devises a scheme to snatch Mary from Alfyorov: during a wretched party given by two of the other lodgers, he makes Alfyorov drink too much, sees him to bed, and sets the alarm clock for him at much too late an hour. Then, on Saturday morning, with Alfyorov still asleep, he goes off to the station to meet Mary, but on his way suddenly and unexpectedly changes his mind. "As Ganin looked up at the roof in the ethereal sky he realized with merciless clarity that his affair with Mary had ended forever. It had lasted no more than four days—four days which were perhaps the happiest days of his life. But now he had exhausted his memories, was sated by them, and the image of Mary, together with that of the old dying poet, now remained in the house of ghosts, which itself was already a memory. . . . Other than that image no Mary existed, nor could exist" (114). He goes straight to a different station and leaves for southern France.

As Pnin has a brief reappearance in *Pale Fire*, reassuring the worried reader that his dismissal from Waindell College was not at all the end of his academic career or worse, so there are several casual mentions of a certain Alfyorov and his wife Mashenka (not Mary) in *The Defense* (the most important is on p. 203). The reader may conclude that in spite of Ganin's stratagem, the couple has been united, apparently not unhappily.

Thus *Mary* is a developmental novel, even if the development is only a brief one. It describes a most important week in Ganin's life. After a long spell of inertia he is prompted to recover his memories and finds they are "much more real, more intense than the lives lived by his shadow in Berlin" (55–56). At the end, however, ". . . the fact that he kept noticing everything with a fresh, loving eye . . . meant a secret turning point for him, an awakening" (113). It's easy to overlook this final twist because it comes so abruptly on the second to last page and because Ganin's new state of mind is never put to a test; however, it is clearly there. Thus there are two reversals in the work: from (dreary) reality to the delights of imagination and back to (bright) reality. What makes reality bright for Ganin in the end is that his memories are not troubling him any longer. He has stored them away safely and is their master now. As Iu. Levin wrote, "The 'sober' and 'mercilessly clear' explanations of the 'awakened' hero become the strongest apology of the reality of his memories."[15] But *Mary* is not just an "apology of dream and memory" (and as such "the expression of a specific émigré consciousness"), because it is precisely Ganin's full possession of his memories that becomes the strongest apology for reality.

In his preface to the English version, Nabokov admitted that he had done what many beginners do, "introducing himself, or a vicar, into his first novel" (xiii), and that Mary is a "twin sister" of his Tamara in *Speak, Memory*. He says he had not consulted *Mary* when he composed chapter 12 in 1949 but later found the novel a "headier extract of personal reality" than the autobiographical account, due simply to the fact that when writing *Mary* he had been much closer in time to the past he was recounting. Mary's old letters that Ganin rereads during his spell of recollection are quotes from the letters Mary's and

Tamara's original wrote to Nabokov during his stay in the Crimea. It is because he had faithfully preserved some of his most cherished memories in his first novel that Nabokov felt "a sentimental stab" of attachment to it, which compensated for "its flaws, the artifacts of innocence and inexperience" (xiv).

Nabokov never knew what had become of the girl he had left behind in Russia. It took *glasnost'* to let some of the facts emerge. Her real name was Valentina ("Liusia") Shulgina. Unlike Mary, she never got out of the Soviet Union; unlike the lady in the story "The Admiralty Spire" (1933), she never turned their youthful love affair into a corny novel. After the Revolution, when the Nabokovs moved to the Crimea, Valentina's father died, her brothers and sisters left Russia, and she moved with her mother into a small and boring place near Poltava in the Ukraine. From there she wrote Nabokov the letters Ganin is reading in *Mary*. In 1919, her mother died from tuberculosis, and as the Reds were gaining the upper hand in the Poltava region, Valentina thought it advisable to move on to Ekaterinodar in the utmost south of Russia which since August 1918 had been a stronghold of the Whites. However, in March, 1920 the Reds conquered Ekaterinodar (and hastened to rename it Krasnodar, "Red-gift"). Valentina was arrested by the Cheka, the dreaded secret political police. It spread what was termed the "Red Terror" to Krasnodar and in August 1920 executed more than two thousand of its citizens. Presumably not of her own will but to be set free or to save her life, Valentina married one of the highest-ranking Cheka officers of South Russia, a certain Mitrofan Konstantinovich Chernyshov. He died in 1936—of natural causes, as it happens. From 1916 to the end of her life, Valentina worked as a typist. She died in 1967 in the Moldavian capital of Kishinev.[16]

Mary can be equated with Valentina, but Ganin cannot be with his author. In the transition from *Happiness* to *Mary*, Nabokov seems deliberately to have introduced a certain unlikeness. Ganin is roughly Nabokov's age, comes from St. Petersburg, seems to have spent his summers on a family estate south of the city much like the Nabokovs' Vyra, is now living an émigré's desultory life in Berlin and, most important of all, looks back on a youthful romance much like Nabokov's. In his narratological analysis of Nabokov's work, Pekka Tammi writes: "In *Mary*, . . . it is repeatedly intimated that Ganin's history may in fact be modelled on N-agent's own experience [i.e., the auctorial narrator's, not to be confused with the real author]. One instance occurs immediately at the outset of the novel, as the impersonal description of the hero's cinematic career . . . gives way to N-agent's confession of having himself gone through identical phases in his personal past. . . . Given the smoothness of the transition from one plane of experience to another, it may be finally impossible to decide for certain which of the cited clauses are used exclusively with reference to the hero and which implicate also the auctorial N—such indeterminacy being apparently the precise point of the method."[17]

But who is the narrator of *Mary*, its N-agent in narratological parlance? Closer inspection shows that he is not a fictional likeness of Nabokov at all but

a "we," and this "we" is not just the narrator speaking of himself in the royal plural. It refers to a group of knowledgeable older people: "as we used to say when we were young" (8), "as many of us have" (9), "our anonymous shadows" (9), "as we know" (60). *Mary*, we conclude, is narrated by a kind of senate. Concerned as he was to be with questions of point of view, Nabokov in his later fiction would never have permitted himself to introduce such an important device and then forget about it.

So in *Mary* we do not find the author painting his self-portrait. The "real" Nabokov keeps his distance by introducing a sort of chorus relating the story and by deliberately making Ganin in many respects pointedly unlike his author. In April 1924, Nabokov was, of course, in love with Véra Slonim and not expecting a sweetheart from the depths of his Russian past, nor was he leaving for one of those sunnier countries (he had worked on a farm in the south of France in 1923). Unlike Nabokov, Ganin had for a short time fought as a White Army officer in the Crimea and received a head wound. Whether he resembles Nabokov in character or appearance is impossible to judge, for there is a strange point about him. On the one hand the novel centers on some of his most intimate memories. On the other hand, it is extremely reticent about him. There is not a word about his family background; he seems to be completely on his own. Once he tells one of his fellow lodgers, the old poet Podtyagin, that Ganin is not his real name and that he has two passports, a real one and a forged one, ever since he wanted to organize a rebellion against the Bolsheviks in Petrograd. But there is no way of determining whether he is telling the truth or making up a story about himself. Quite rightly the other boarders consider him mysterious.

However, the most important respect in which Ganin differs from Nabokov is that he is not a writer, nor does he intend to become one. Some of the early reviewers of *Mary* found the hero too light, too insubstantial, and considered this insubstantiality the book's main flaw. Mikhail Osorgin in 1926 noted that "in his soul there is a void."[18] Leona Toker, emphasizing Ganin's unpleasant traits and analyzing the conflict between what she termed his creative pursuits and human commitments, called him "a consummate solipsist" who does not give his fellow humans a thought: "For the sake of the poetic image of Mary he not only sacrifices Mary herself but also spurns any commitment to the essentially well-meaning people around him."[19] The reason for such judgments is Ganin's aloof and lackadaisical manner. He does not seem to have anything of importance to do, may come or go, stay or leave as he pleases on a second's whim. That somebody of his intelligence, perceptiveness, and good practical sense should drift through life without a single aim creates the impression that for all his good humor there is something quite dreadfully wrong with him. Either something essential about him remains hidden from his fellow lodgers and from the reader, or else his high spirits must be a willful deceit, perhaps masking the fact that exile has in some subtle way shattered his soul. Of course, this doubtful something about him would vanish

immediately if the reader were told that he is a budding poet. Deprived of the status of an artist, he is living an aesthete's life without redemption by any work of art.

Yet during the week the reader may watch him, Ganin indulges in a sublimely artistic undertaking: an effort of perfect recall.

It is therefore imperative to have a closer look at what Ganin is doing. In his discussion of *Mary*, Brian Boyd counts among the novel's youthful flaws the "absurdly steady disclosure of Ganin's memories of Mary from 1915 to 1919, handily unfolding for the reader's convenience and ignoring the psychology of memory."[20] This perhaps is missing the point of what Nabokov makes Ganin do. For the appreciation of the novel it is essential to realize that Ganin does not vaguely reminisce, diffusely thinking of this and that as it comes to his mind. If he did, then indeed the neat orderliness of his recollections would be an absurd violation of the psychology of memory. But what he does is something else. In his three-day trance he tries to reconstruct perfectly a certain part of his personal past.

"The right bank sloped gently, with purple patches of heather between dappled birch trees. And then cool darkness enveloped the boat under the bridge; from above came the heavy beat of hooves and wheels and, as the boat glided out, the dazzling sun flashed on the tips of the oars, and displayed the haycart crossing the low bridge and a green slope crowned by the white pillars of a boarded-up Alexandrine country mansion. Then a dark wood came down to the water's edge on both banks, and with a gentle rustle the boat sailed into the reeds" (58). To produce such a picture, Ganin is not just recalling the general outline of the countryside (river, banks, woods, a mansion) but seeing all of it so clearly before his mind's eye and recapturing the sensation coming with it so perfectly that he can go and pick any detail he wishes. He is recalling the plants (birch trees, heather, firs, reed), the changes of light and temperature (the cool darkness underneath a bridge), the sounds (hooves, wheels, the rustle of the boat gliding into the reeds), and even the fleeting flashes of sunlight on the oars. But there is a telling detail: the sound of the hooves and the haycart. Sounds like these belong to those countless trifles that keep flooding our mind and are immediately discarded as meaningless "noise." Such noise cannot be summoned from the mental recesses psychologists call episodic memory. It is only the following memory (the sight of the haycart) that makes the mind infer and insert the first one (the sounds). When reconstructing an episode, the mind is evoking details, evaluating them, selecting them, putting them in order, abandoning some, calling for others and thus building around what memory traces it can lay hold of the plausible semblance of a complete episode. When he who embarks on such a venture succeeds, he can rightly say that he has "relived" the particular episode. The sights, the sounds and the accompanying sentiments, all are there again, and they seem to be more one's own than they were originally, for now they are the mind's creations.

This is well in tune with how today's psychologists tend to see the workings of memory. What might be loosely termed the video tape theory of memory is losing its credibility. Dear to the Freudian school and to those impressed by Wilder Penfield's brain stimulation experiments in the forties, it maintained that all of our experiences are perfectly stored away in memory and that all it takes to remember is to press the right button and replay the original episode. Today, however, psychologists lean toward a "constructional" view of memory, as first propounded by British psychologist F.C. Bartlett.[21] Psychologist Elizabeth Loftus, among others, has given ample evidence of the constructional—and hence malleable—nature of human memory.[22]

In Nabokov's view, such a methodical re-creation of past episodes is the prerequisite of all artistic production. To an interviewer he remarked in 1971: "The act of retention is the act of art, artistic selection, artistic blending, artistic re-combination of actual events" (*SO* 186). That is, in *Mary* he is making Ganin do what he himself had done in Cambridge, where, in his own words, he had completed "the careful reconstruction of my artificial but beautiful, beautifully exact Russia."[23]

Ganin's quest is a poetical one not only by inference from the example of his author, who must have strained his own memories in a similar way before he could create the novel at hand. It is a poetical exercise by the very nature of the act—for only such elaborated evocation of one's past sensual experiences puts at one's disposal the material the creative writer needs.

As to the workings of memory, there is one passing remark in the novel that the normal reader may not think much of but which will delight the brain and behavioral scientist, and which proves that Nabokov was indeed an excellent psychologist: ". . . memory can restore to life everything except smells, although nothing revives the past so completely as a smell that was once associated with it" (60). This is not one of those fanciful interpretations the literary set is so fond of and which for a certain time pass as profound. Rather, it is an acute and probably correct observation, the very basis of science. It is put to use a few pages later when "a tender whiff of carbide" from a Berlin garage brings back to Ganin the bicycle lamp he used to load before setting out to his trysts with Mary at the Voskresensk mansion—and with it much else (67). When Nabokov wrote this, Proust's *Recherche* which made so much of the memory-evoking power of a certain smell (a madeleine cookie soaked in lime-flower tea) had not yet been completely published. An insight of this order proves that even at the outset of his literary career Nabokov was much closer in spirit to modern bioscience than most other eminent writers, an affinity that was to make him immune to the temptations of Freudianism with its preposterous, albeit interesting, sham explanations.

With its compact, simple, and fragile structure, *Mary* is different from Nabokov's later fiction. As Laurie Clancy noted, "*Mary* quite lacks that almost daunting appearance of completeness and certainty that marks even *King,*

Queen, Knave."[24] *Mary* has little verbal play, little auctorial viciousness, and no concealed underpinnings. "Nabokov lays very few traps for the reader."[25] Through hindsight, however, it is easy to discover several features it shares with Nabokov's later prose. One of them is the preoccupation with time and memory. Another is a disdain for abstract ruminations of a political, sociological, or aesthetic order within a work of fiction. Still another is a disdain for pat symbols. It is true that when in the opening scene Ganin and Alfyorov are stalled in the elevator, the latter calls the situation—waiting motionless in the darkness—symbolic, and G.M. Hyde has taken this as the author's opinion.[26] However, by putting the symbolic interpretation in obnoxious Alfyorov's mouth, the novel does not condone it at all but rather denounces it as trite ("*poshlost'*"). A fourth feature is that special Nabokovian camera lucida effect: the power of precise and richly detailed perception. The reader who sees a scene rise before his eyes and senses its "feel" tends to forget that he is not just facing an act of verbal photography (i.e., a photographic memory translated into language) but an act that presupposes a keen analytic and combinational sense. It is this contribution of individual consciousness which made a perceptive early critic, Iuly Aikhenval'd, note that in Sirin's (Nabokov's) prose every detail is "suffused with life, with meaning, with psyche"[27]—an observation that was to remain true for all of Nabokov's work.[28]

It is remarkable that Aikhenval'd noticed this suffusion with life and meaning of the descriptive passages as early as *Mary*, for the novel has as yet relatively little of what was to become a major attribute of Nabokov's prose. It is mostly dubbed "personification" or "anthropomorphization" of inanimate objects but should rather be called "vitalization" or "animation," for the things are brought to life in general, not necessarily to human life—e.g., the refrigerator "awakening." (Nabokov avoids the perils of this ploy by the usually ironic overtones he bestows on these animations.) Three examples from *Mary* are the armchair severed from its companion and therefore "pining" in Ganin's room (6), the sun "tangling" with the wheels of motorcars (66), the shops still "asleep" behind their iron grilles (112).

That the evocative description can be done and that he could do it was a discovery Nabokov undoubtedly made when conjuring up Ganin's past (or rather attributing his own quest for his past to a literary character), and he was to draw on it for the rest of his life.

There is a film version of *Mary* (1986), entitled *Mashenka*, written by John Mortimer and directed by John Goldschmidt, a multi-language coproduction for television networks in Austria, Britain, France, and Germany.[29] It follows Nabokov's novel quite closely, with southern Finland posing quite convincingly as Nabokov's prerevolutionary Russia. There is only one major deviation: at the very end, the film shows Mashenka, absent from the novel except for Ganin's and Alfyorov's recollections of her, actually stepping from the train in a railway station and finding neither Alfyorov (whom she expects to meet) nor Ganin (who until a few minutes ago had expected to meet her).

To add some action, the film also inserts a few episodes that are not in the book. They all pertain to Ganin's youth in Russia and prove that Mortimer and Goldschmidt have dived into Nabokov and wittingly or unwittingly tried to fuse Nabokov and Ganin. In the first of these, borrowed from a hint in *Speak, Memory* (chapter 6), Ganin during a butterfly hunt in 1918 is arrested as a foreign agent by Bolshevik guards whose suspicions his butterfly net has aroused. In two scenes there are discussions between his father (who in the novel is not mentioned at all) and various acquaintances, making it clear that his family belonged to the highest Russian aristocracy (which is not true, but which some reviewers keep asserting) and that nonetheless his father entertained liberal political views (which Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov certainly did). In the most important of these scenes Ganin's father, with Ganin at his side, is driven to a Baltic port from where they hope to leave Russia. The car is stopped by some Red guards, and while Ganin senior is explaining to the crowd that he always has been a friend of the people, a sniper shoots him. The episode certainly was invented to reflect something similar to what Nabokov himself had undergone. Nabokov, however, probably would never have permitted any fictional extemporizing on the death of his father, who was shot in 1922 during an émigré meeting at a Berlin concert hall by two Russian proto-Fascists.

Though not without merits and trying hard to render the novel faithfully, the film to me seemed a lot paler and slighter than the book. Perhaps even in *Mary*, when Nabokov was still in quest of a prose style of his own, the main event—lost in the process of turning it into a film—was a stylistic one.

Dieter E. Zimmer

NOTES

1. Cf. Boyd, 1990, p. 241.
2. Juliar, p. 52.
3. L. Foster, "Nabokov in Russian Émigré Criticism," p. 43; Struve, 1926.
4. ". . . the number of changes grows in inverse proportion to the author's age at the time of writing." Proffer, 1970, p. 293–94.
5. Grayson, p. 125.
6. Ibid.
7. Boyd, 1990, p. 237. The story was published in *Rul'*, January 29, 1925, pp. 2–3. The English title under which it appeared in *A Russian Beauty*, 1970, was "A Letter That Never Reached Russia."
8. Böhmig, p. 22, and Andersen, p. 14.
9. Urban, pp. 59–93, and Andersen, p. 15–17.
10. Andersen, p. 19.
11. Nicolas Nabokov, p. 52–53, translation by D.E. Zimmer.
12. Bely, 1924, pp. 26–38, quoted from Mierau (ed.), 1988, pp. 56–68, translation by D.E. Zimmer.

13. R. Williams, p. 249.
14. *Details of a Sunset*, p. 94.
15. Levin, 1985, p. 34.
16. For more on Valentina Shulgina, see V. Stark, 1991, and Zimmer, 1991, who received much information about Valentina Shulgina from Natalia Teletova in St. Petersburg.
17. Tammi, 1985, p. 44.
18. Osorgin, 1926, trans. 1984, p. 44.
19. Toker, 1985, p. 309.
20. Boyd, 1990, p. 249.
21. Bartlett, p. 218.
22. Loftus.
23. Interview with Kurt Hoffman, 1971. The whole passage on Cambridge is not included in *Strong Opinions*.
24. Clancy, p. 23.
25. Ibid., p. 24.
26. Hyde, p. 39. Hyde also maintains that "the specific locale"—the elevator—is withheld from the reader and that withholding a crucial clue "anticipates Nabokov's subsequent interest in the mechanics of plot," originating in "Russian Formalist criticism, and especially Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie*, the defamiliarization of the world." This is a grandiose theory based on a wrong assumption. It goes back to Field, 1967, p. 126, who wrote, "we do not learn . . . that the opening scene . . . takes place in a stalled lift until several chapters later." It is true the word "elevator" is not mentioned, but it is made perfectly clear where Ganin and Alfyorov are caught. Being stalled in a dark cubicle that has ceased to go up but presently becomes lighted again and takes you up to your floor should be ample clues. (Field also argued, wrongly, that Podtyagin dies in the novel and, very probably wrongly, that Ganin and Mary had never made love.)
27. Aikhenval'd, 1926, p. 2.
28. Naumann, "The Poetry of Nabokov's Prose," has collected from *Mary* a host of examples of Nabokov's poetical style.
29. A "Clasart / Jörn Donner / FR 3 / ZDF Production in collaboration with Channel Four," the credit lines read.

NABOKOV AND BELY

The question of what links Nabokov to various Russian writers has yet to be examined in the detail that it deserves. Nabokov spoke candidly of his few strong sympathies for other writers, and his numerous and equally strong antipathies, in his interviews, prefaces, and lectures. He also echoed, parodied, and satirized many Russian and non-Russian writers in his fictions. But as far as I know, other than occasionally making a laconic and ambiguous acknowledgment of Pushkin's and Gogol's importance for him, Nabokov systematically objected to virtually all suggestions that any other writer had ever influenced him (*SO* 103, 151; see the articles on Nabokov and these writers in this volume). This stance was part of his public persona.

The mask slips, however, in a private document—a letter from 1949 to the American man of letters Edmund Wilson—in which Nabokov objects to the latter's singularly uninformed remark that Russian literature underwent a decadence after 1905: "The 'decline' of Russian literature in 1905–1917 is a Soviet invention," Nabokov explains, because "Blok, Bely, Bunin and others wrote their best stuff in those days. And never was poetry so popular, not even in Pushkin's days. *I am a product of that period, I was bred in that atmosphere*" (*NWL* 220; italics added)." This is a highly revealing admission, for it indicates that Nabokov saw his own artistic origins in the so-called Silver Age of Russian culture.[1] But in what specific aspects of this variegated period did they lie? It is certainly noteworthy that Nabokov mentions two Symbolists—Blok and Bely. But he also includes Bunin on his short list, who is usually, and very loosely, classified as a "realist" (although it is known that Nabokov valued his verse more than his prose; *SM* 285), and he implies that there are other figures, presumably belonging to other classificational categories, who were important for him as well. With all due respect to Nabokov's contempt for generalizations—particularly for academic categories that end in "ism"—I would like to suggest that the Russian literary movements during the period 1905–17 whose theories and practices are closest to Nabokov are Symbolism and Acmeism, with, perhaps, a tilt toward the former. Specifically, Blok, Bely, and Gumilev appear to have influenced aspects of his artistic development. Another significant influence on Nabokov is the poetry of Vladislav Khodasevich, which is also a product of the Silver Age. (See the articles in this volume on Nabokov and all these writers.) Added to this is the possibility that one of his most productive ideas—the predominance of artifice in nature—may have been derived from, or influenced by two individuals who were contemporaries of the well-known writers of the Silver Age and shared some traits with the Symbolists—the occultist Petr Dem'ianovich Uspensky (1878–1947; known in English as P.D. Ouspensky), and the playwright, director, historian, and theoretician of the theater Nikolai Nikolaevich Evreinov (1879–1953). (See the articles on Nabokov and these two figures.)

The relation of Nabokov to all five of these individuals as well as their contemporaries is a large and complicated topic that deserves its own book-length study. A useful sense of the complexity of such an endeavor can be found in Nabokov's own description of the "mechanism" of literary influence as he conceived it in 1930: "[It] is a dark and unclear thing. One may imagine, for example, two writers, A and B, completely different but both under a certain very subjective influence; this influence goes unnoticed by reader C inasmuch as each of the three (A, B, and C) has understood Proust in his own way. It happens that a writer has an oblique influence through another writer, or that some sort of complex blending of influences takes place, and so on. One may not foresee anything in this regard."[2]

With the above statement as a necessary caveat, it would be useful to characterize briefly what links Nabokov to the Silver Age in general. Para-

mount is the dominance of lyric poetry at the turn of the century, a point Nabokov underscores in his letter to Wilson. This is reflected not only in the fact that Nabokov began as a poet and that he continued to write poetry all his life but most importantly in the poetization of his prose fiction, which relies heavily on alliteration and rhythm and even contains passages written in meter. It is quite possible that Andrei Bely's poeticized prose was a specific, intermediate model in this regard. As far as Aleksei Remizov is concerned, Nabokov is reported to have thought little of him as a writer.[3] (Nabokov's opinion would, of course, not have been affected by the fact that Remizov is a forerunner of the "ornamental prose" style, which, although normally used to characterize certain Soviet works of the early 1920s, bears some resemblance to Nabokov's style.) The "addition" of rhythm and alliteration to prose results in qualitative and not merely quantitative changes in its density and complexity. This can be related to another feature of Nabokov's novels and stories that may also be traceable to the influence of poetry—their reflexive structure, which is akin to what Frank has termed "spatial form" in modern literature. Nabokov's belletristic prose is fashioned in accordance with the structure of the epiphanic experience he called "cosmic synchronization" in *Speak, Memory* (218), as a result of which the reader can understand certain crucial levels of meaning in a work only by grasping simultaneously the connections among word groups that are scattered throughout the text and embedded in contexts that conceal the words' true import (see the article on "The Otherworld"). Thus Nabokov's prose fiction, like much modernist literature with roots in late nineteenth and twentieth-century poetry according to Frank, requires the reader to suspend temporarily the process of identifying signs in the text with referents outside it, "until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity."[4]

Different aspects of the varied legacy of Andrei Bely (pseudonym of Boris Bugaev, 1880–1934), a major Russian Symbolist poet, novelist, memoirist, and theoretician of literature and Symbolism, attracted Nabokov during much of his life. In a well-known "strong opinion" that has done more for Bely's reputation in the United States than anything else anyone has ever said about him, Nabokov announced that Bely's *chef d'oeuvre,* the novel *Petersburg* (1916, 1922), is one of the four greatest works of twentieth-century prose, together with Joyce's *Ulysses*, the first half of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, and Kafka's "Metamorphosis" (*SO* 57). Nabokov also paid special tribute to Bely's insights about the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol in his own study of the author (*NG* 76, 91). (See the separate articles on Nabokov and all these writers in this volume.) On a number of occasions, Nabokov singled out Bely's approach to Russian versification (embodied in several essays in the volume *Simvolizm* [Symbolism, 1910]) for unusual praise. In a letter to Wilson from 1942, Nabokov refers to these as "probably the greatest work on verse in any language" (*NWL* 78). In his Commentary to his translation of *Eugene Onegin* (Vol. III, p. 459), Nabokov acknowledges that he became greatly fascinated with Bely's essays

during his youth. And in a letter to his sister from 1950 Nabokov reveals that the utility of Bely's ideas on versification has still not paled for him with the passing years when he mentions that in his teaching at Wellesley he uses tables based on Bely's system that he had fashioned with her in the Crimea in 1919.[5]

It is probably the quasi-scientific descriptive force of Bely's work on versification that elicited Nabokov's praise for it. But what are the reasons for his admiration for *Petersburg*? As far as I am aware, there are no written comments by Nabokov about Bely's masterpiece, or Bely in general, that shed any light on this question (but see the article on *Speak, Memory* in this volume). However, if we consider Nabokov's broadest aesthetic criteria—about which he was very clear and insistent on many occasions—we can infer that he must have valued *Petersburg* as a skillfully wrought artifact quite unlike anything that Russian, or, indeed, European literature had ever seen. But to say this is to say something that is at once necessary and so general as to be virtually useless. Bely's manner is inseparable from his matter and Nabokov surely recognized this. Thus it is tempting to speculate that he would not have ignored Bely's frankly metaphysical thematics in *Petersburg* and elsewhere, and focused exclusively on the novel's linguistic, stylistic, and formal features.

Two reasons support this inference: first, the general congruence between Bely's and Nabokov's aesthetics as they defined them in their theoretical writings and, second, the fact that several of Nabokov's novels contain evocations of key moments, motifs, or ideas from both Bely's fictional and discursive writings that point to his metaphysics.

There are at least four points of contact between Bely's and Nabokov's aesthetics.[6]

1. Both see a causal connection between the perceiver–artist's cognitive act and the resulting work of art; but whereas in Bely's theory there is an implied mimetic relationship between the symbolic perception and the work, in Nabokov's case the symbolic perception acts as a catalyst for the "germ" of the future work, which does not necessarily have a connection with the sensory or other data that gave rise to it (although it may, as Nabokov describes in *SM* 217).

2. Nabokov's seminal concept "cosmic synchronization" bears a strong resemblance to Bely's symbolic cognition; indeed, in *The Gift*, this form of privileged perception is described as "a supersensory insight into the world accompanied by our inner participation" (310), which could also serve as an encapsulation of Bely's ideas.

3. For Bely and Nabokov individual cognitive acts are relative in the sense that each cognizing subject is unique and therefore

infuses an aspect of the world outside himself with an aspect of that uniqueness (another way of saying this is that the world each subject perceives is unique). In fact, in two separate interviews, Nabokov virtually echos Bely when he claims that the existence of anything outside the individual perceiver is a function of that individual's cognitive act. Nabokov also goes so far as to claim that so-called "average reality begins to rot and stink" when individual creative perception ceases (*SO* 10–11, 118); this recalls Bely's very similar point in his major essay "Magiia slov" ("The Magic of Words," 1909) about words that have lost their creative, poetic character being "a foul-smelling, decaying corpse."[7]

4. For both Bely and Nabokov the source of the work of art lies at least partially in a transcendent realm: in Bely's case the Absolute acts through the perceiver-artist when he focuses on something outside himself; and in Nabokov's, an otherworld yields the seed of the work of art to the artist-perceiver during the timeless moment of cosmic synchronization that is also initiated when he focuses on something outside himself.[8] In both cases, it is the role of the transcendent during the creative process that saves individual perceptions from being mere solipsistic projections. (It is of course evident that the roots of these conceptions lie in German Idealism and ultimately in Plato.)

If we move now to the level of general aesthetic tactics, we find a fundamental parallel between the value both Bely and Nabokov place on deception in art. Fyodor in *The Gift* clearly echos Nabokov when he says about chess: "Every creator is a plotter; and all the pieces impersonating his ideas on the board were here as conspirators and sorcerers. Only in the final instant was their secret spectacularly revealed" (172). Bely proclaims a very similar principle in *Zapiski chudaka* (*Notes of an Eccentric*; Vol. I, 63): "Thus every novel is a game of hide and seek with the reader; and the aim of the architectonics, the phrase is exclusively—to lead the reader's eye away from the sacred point, the birth of myth." The praxis of both writers is of course precisely to conceal or make difficult what is most important.

A major difference between Nabokov's and Bely's metaphysical aesthetics is that Nabokov describes his beliefs in terms of intuitions and intimations, whereas Bely tends to pedantic certainty—whether in passages pretending to rigorous philosophical analysis or oracular solemnity. This underlies a number of radically different stylistic and formal characteristics of the two authors'

novels. Bely's are characterized by a frenzied surface texture of events occurring on various terrestrial and spiritual planes of being, which reflects his complex, anthroposophically influenced, multi-planar worldview. His prose is often heavily and obviously rhythmical and relies on extensive and "loud" sound repetitions. This is quite unlike the generally more placid and cohesive-looking surfaces of Nabokov's works, beneath which are hidden subtle and ambiguous signs of otherworldly influence on human affairs. Nabokov's narrative rhythms are much more subtle and complex, and his prose takes on metrical patterns only locally and for very specific thematic reasons. In similar fashion, Nabokov's exquisitely modulated sound repetitions are much more refined than Bely's frequently stentorian effects.

A number of notable Bely echoes appear in *The Gift*.[9] Fyodor refers openly to Bely's theories about rhythmic structures in poetry and calls attention to his own parody of Bely's rhythmicized prose from the late novels (151: 170; 157: 177). More interesting, however, is Nabokov's unmarked evocation of elements from Bely's works that imply man's dependence on a transcendent realm. An example is Fyodor's description of how he tries to infer the "law of composition" according to which shops are arranged on Berlin streets. When he does not find the expected sequence where he lives, he speculates that the proper "rhythmic swarming had not yet established itself" ("roenie ritma tut eshche ne nastalo," 5: 11). The two words "roi" ("swarm") and "ritm" ("rhythm") are among the most important and insistently repeated leitmotifs in Bely's famous autobiographical novel *Kotik Letaev* (1917–18), where they refer to the fundamental causative principle by which the world of spirit shapes the protagonist's material world.[10] Nabokov appears to be alluding to the same kind of spiritual significance because Fyodor's search for a pattern among shops is but one particular, and in this case lighthearted, instance of his search for fatidic patterning throughout the novel, which, in fact, he finds wherever he looks—in his material world, in his relations with Zina and other characters, and in nature.

There are several intriguing evocations of details from *Petersburg* in *The Gift* as well. On the novel's second page a thought occurs to Fyodor about a future work he would like to write, which is presumably the novel *The Gift* itself: "[eto] podumalos' mel'kom s bespechnoi ironiei—sovershenno, vprochem, izlishneiu, potomu-chto kto-to vnutri nego, za nego, pomimo nego, vse eto uzhe prinial, zapisal i pripriatal" (because of differences between the languages, the English translation does not convey the passive nature of this experience quite as strikingly as the Russian: "The fleeting thought was touched with a careless irony; an irony, however, that was quite unnecessary, because somebody within him, on his behalf, independently from him, had absorbed all this, recorded it, and filed it away," 4: 10). The reflexive verb form, "podumalos'" (literally, but impossibly, in English "it thought itself") augments the description of Fyodor as being split between a passive, mundane self and a hidden, active, artistic self. Nabokov's point here, as elsewhere in the

novel, is to hint that there is a spiritual side to Fyodor that acts as the receptor for the otherworldly "germ" of the work of art. A related sort of thinking occurs to characters and the narrator in *Petersburg* as well. The verbal cluster "podumalos'" "s bespechnoi" or "izlishneiu" "ironiei" (literally: "it thought itself" "with careless" or "unnecessary" "irony") recalls the phrases "dumy dumalis' sami" ("meditations meditated themselves"), "mysli myslilis' sami" ("thoughts thought themselves"), and "prazdnaia [or 'nekomu nenuzhnaia'] mozgovaia igra" ("idle [or, literally, 'unnecessary to anyone'] cerebral play") that appear in many of the most important scenes in *Petersburg*.[11] The significance of these phrases, which Bely seems to use as interchangeable synonyms, is that they describe or imply the intrusion of occult forces into the minds of different personages—forces whose effect is to *create* aspects of those personages' worlds. It is most significant for understanding *Petersburg* that the narrator–author claims he, too, is subject to these forces and that his book results from them. This is yet another parallel with Fyodor's passive thought about a future work that turns out to be the novel *The Gift*.

A similar evocation of *Petersburg* can be discerned in Fyodor's childhood dream about an expedition into Asia, in which he sees himself as a tortured horse screaming "in a Mongolian voice" ("mongol'skim golosom") and has the sensation that "someone would unstitch me from top to bottom, after which an agile hand would slip inside me and powerfully squeeze my heart" (*Gift* 17: 23). We find a related scene in *Petersburg* when Apollon Apollonovich almost freezes to death in the countryside and feels someone's cold fingers thrust into his chest and stroke his heart; the same hand then proceeds to lead him up the steps of his career (vol. I, 104–105: 52–53; this image has additional antecedents in Vladimir Soloviev's apocalyptic "Brief Tale About the Antichrist," Ivan's encounter with the devil in *Brothers Karamazov*, and, possibly, in Pushkin's poem "The Prophet"). This passage is one of many that shows Apollon Apollonovich to be the agent of malevolent, reactionary, and ossifying forces that are associated with the so-called "pan-Mongolian" phase of Soloviev's eschatology, which constitutes an imaginative elaboration on the Biblical Book of Revelations. Fyodor's dream also implies that his destiny is shaped by an otherworldly force, which follows from the fact that references to Asia in *The Gift* are linked to hints that the spirit of Fyodor's father, who conducted expeditions into Asia, has been subtly guiding Fyodor's life. (At the same time, it must be stressed that there are major differences between Bely's and Nabokov's uses of Asia in their novels and that they cannot be simply equated.)

The Real Life of Sebastian Knight contains a number of additional evocations of *Petersburg* and other aspects of Bely's legacy. V.'s reference to the "unconscious cerebration" (181) that he believes has led him correctly throughout his attempt to reconstruct the life and psychology of his deceased half-brother resembles the "self-thinking thoughts" and "idle cerebral play" that punctuate major moments of characters' lives in *Petersburg*. Bely's radical claim at the end

of the first chapter of *Petersburg* that his fictions will henceforth be as real for the reader as the reader's own world is taken a step further in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* when Mr. Siller, one of Sebastian's fictional characters, comes to life as the salesman and detective Mr. Silbermann. In his aesthetics and his belletristic works Sebastian Knight recalls Nabokov himself. For this reason Sebastian's description in his final novel of a traveller reading a landscape as if various parts of it were an alphabet is especially intriguing (176–79). The symbolistic cognitive stance this implies is very similar to Bely's description of his journey from Switzerland to Russia in *Zapiski chudaka* (Vol. I, 155–58) as constituting an occult script. (Behind both Nabokov's description and Bely's memoir may lie Baudelaire's famous sonnet "Correspondances," in which nature sometimes utters "confuses paroles.") Tammi has also pointed out similar formulations about the relation between art and an otherworld in Nabokov's and Bely's studies of Gogol.[12] (Some other possible ties between Bely and Nabokov include echoes of *Petersburg* in *The Defense* and in *Invitation to a Beheading*, which, like some of Nabokov's poems, also contains echoes of *Kotik Letaev*).

Finally, there is a basic structural parallel between Bely's and Nabokov's novels that derives from their comparable reliance on "Romantic irony." At the conclusion of *Petersburg*'s first chapter, the author steps forward to discuss how his characters appeared before him and how he has displayed "pictures of illusions" before the reader. Many of Nabokov's works contain a comparable intrusive authorial consciousness. "Romantic irony" has of course been an important feature of the novel since Cervantes. But what distinguishes Bely's and Nabokov's uses of it is that both ultimately treat "Romantic irony" *ironically*. In *Petersburg*, Bely goes on to reveal that what may seem to be merely "pictures of illusions" are in fact manifestations of creative occult forces acting through him, and he concludes by claiming that his fiction is thus as real as the reader's own world. Similarly, in Nabokov's novels the authorial intrusions function as analogues on the level of the text of what characters perceive to be fatidic patterning on the level of their fictional worlds. Thus what may appear to be Nabokov's purely metaliterary device is in fact a model of the metaphysical tie between man and the otherworld, including, presumably, the reader. Moreover, since in Nabokov's novels (as in his aesthetics) it is repeatedly suggested that the source of art lies in the otherworld, the effect of authorial intrusions is to sanction the validity and verisimilitude of the text that they appear to disrupt. Nabokov signalled this himself when he explained in the Introduction to *Bend Sinister* that the author appearing in the conclusion of the novel was "an anthropomorphic deity impersonated by me" (xviii).

However suggestive the similarities between Nabokov and aspects of Bely's thought and art may be, they should not be allowed to obscure the obvious stylistic, formal, and thematic differences between *Petersburg* and Bely's other works and most of Nabokov's fictions. At most, Bely can be

posited as one of a series of Russian authors who apparently played a role in Nabokov's development as a writer.

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NOTES

1. On the basis of the same letter, Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 2–3, also concludes that Symbolism was important for Nabokov. Others who have remarked on Nabokov's ties to this period include Struve, 1984, p. 284, who speaks of Nabokov's debt to Bely; and Karlinsky, "Introduction" (*NWL* 20). See also Boyd, 1990, pp. 149–52. By contrast, Field, 1977, p. 95, claims that except for Blok "there is absolutely no influence upon Nabokov by the artists of the Silver Age." Field also claims that in an (unspecified) interview Nabokov "denied the influence of the Russian Symbolists," even though he admitted to digesting the "entire population" of the Silver Age. At the same time, Field claims that Bely's influence begins after 1917.
2. Quoted by Field, 1967, p. 265.
3. Field, 1986, p. 188. Boyd, 1990, p. 287.
4. Frank, p. 13; Sisson, 1979, p. 3, makes a similar point.
5. *Perepiska s sestroi*, p. 62. Field, 1986, p. 55, and Boyd, 1990, pp. 149–50, report on Nabokov's contacts with Bely's ideas during the period 1917–19. Fyodor in *The Gift* attempts to write poetry in accordance with Bely's theories (151: 170). A useful survey of parallels between Nabokov and Bely is D. Barton Johnson's "Belyj and Nabokov"; see also Georges Nivat's article on "*Speak, Memory*" in this volume.
6. This summary of Bely's ideas is derived from my book *Andrei Bely*, pp. 103–106. For more on Nabokov's aesthetics, see my *Nabokov's Otherworld.*
7. Bely, *Simvolizm*, p. 436. English translation by Cassedy, p. 100.
8. Nabokov's conception of the process that yields the work of art can also be summarized as a form of movement *a realibus ad realiora* (from the real to the more real), which is the epitome of Viacheslav Ivanov's Symbolist aesthetics; see his essay "O granitsakh iskusstva" (1913). It is of course also essential to stress that in addition to this abstract similarity there are major, indeed irreconcilable, differences between the aesthetic platforms, beliefs, and artistic practices of Ivanov and Nabokov.
9. Page references to the Russian original of *The Gift* (*Dar*, New York: Chekhov, 1952) will be given in the text following the English page references.
10. See my *Andrei Bely*, pp. 161–62.
11. Bely, *Peterburg*, vol. I, p. 42; vol. II, p. 143; Bely, *Petersburg*, pp. 18, 218. Hereafter, all page references will be given in the text in the form (Russian: English). For more on "self-thinking thoughts" see my *Andrei Bely*, pp. 116–18.
12. Tammi, 1985, pp. 24, 24 n. 63.

NABOKOV AND BERGSON

Nabokov's answer to a question about his religion, "I know more than I can express in words, and the little I can express would not have been expressed, had I not known more" (*SO* 45), points to his accepting the possibility of a kind of nonrelational knowledge not amenable to intellect or verbal communication. It likewise suggests that no established belief in a personal God approximates this "knowledge" any closer than does materialist philosophy. Nabokov's rejection of both is in tune with the position of Henri Bergson whose nontechnical and at times highly poetic prose affected the work of many of his contemporaries and who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1927.

Nabokov mentions Bergson among poets and novelists who were his "top favorites" between the two World Wars (*SO* 43); this suggests that, to quote "Torpid Smoke," at one time or another the philosopher may have "done his heart good."[1] It is not easy to determine whether (or to what extent) Nabokov was actually influenced by Bergson or whether he may have recognized in him a kindred attitude to the world, especially since Bergson's works display a professional competence in what at the turn of the century was the state of the art in the theories of evolution, genetics, entomology, and other branches of life science.

However that may be, echoes of Bergson's *Matter and Memory* can be heard in Godunov-Cherdyntsev's imaginary conversation with the poet Koncheyev in *The Gift*;[2] and a number of remarks, metaphors, or turns of phrase throughout Nabokov's works can be annotated with the help of Bergson.[3] More importantly, Bergson's system yields a useful commentary on Nabokov's ubiquitous theme of artistic creativity. The central idea in Bergson's cosmogony is that of the "vital impetus" which can be identified with the current of life and with creative consciousness. This impulse is imagined as running through all forms of life, constantly impeded by the opposite current, that of inert matter; from matter it cuts out the forms of life bearing an imprint of the contingent resistance overcome in their creation. Yet the mind-matter dualism is only apparent in this system. Bergson compares consciousness, or rather "supra-consciousness," to "the rocket whose extinguished fragments fall back as matter."[4] Matter thus emerges as a by-product of the vital impetus: "for we seize from within, we live at every instant, a creation of form, and it is just in those cases in which the form is pure, and in which the creative current is momentarily interrupted, that there is a creation of matter" (*Creative Evolution*, pp. 261–62). Inherent in matter, with its ways of storing and releasing energy, is the tendency towards dissolution; hence one of the functions of the vital impetus is the constant staving off of what can be imagined as gravity, the running out of potential energies, entropy, pulverization, death. Perception, according to Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, is delayed action—it prepares one for further confrontations with the obstacles raised by the material world. Yet the creativity of perception can be enhanced through the education of the

senses, whereby perception is taught to take account of the useless, the incidental—of all that lateral current of matter which is not necessarily a frontal impediment to life-sustaining activity. Such perception is evidently akin to the disinterested contemplation that is involved in aesthetic experience. Together with scientific inquiry and other efforts of human intelligence, this is one of the ways through which matter is reabsorbed into the life of the spirit.

As if continuing such a train of thought, Nabokov writes that "Average reality begins to rot and stink as soon as the act of individual creation ceases to animate a subjectively perceived texture" (*SO* 118). In Nabokov's works individual creation is not limited to officially recognized kinds of artistic production; it embraces a loving and generous response to life and nature as well as authentic living, a way of life which is only partly influenced by the mesh of social duties and conventions.

Bergson's cosmogony does not consecutively derive from his observations as a naturalist. These observations support his criticism of conflicting metaphysical theories and, in a sense, inspire his surmises, yet Bergson's transition from reasoning to insight usually takes the shape of lateral move: for a moment the philosopher seems to step aside from the train of his ideas; he then returns to it, bringing along a radically novel suggestion which helps reorganize his data and infuse the intellectual process with a new vitality. This is a practical expression of Bergson's dichotomizing of intelligence and instinct. The sphere of the former is inert matter, whereas the latter is turned to life: the cleavage between the two faculties is a product of evolutionary development; therefore elements of each still hover around the other. Creative evolution seems to be directed towards higher modes of consciousness which are not quite available to either faculty in isolation: "*There are things that intelligence alone is able to seek, but which, by itself, it will never find. These things instinct alone could find; but it will never seek them*" (*Creative Evolution,* p. 167; italics in the text). Bergson thus valorizes not only the work of the intellect but also intuition, which is "instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely" (*Creative Evolution,* p. 194). He also valorizes that which is at a still greater remove from plodding intelligence, namely mystical experience, a source of the "dynamic religion" which he opposes to the "static religion," the latter being a product of social instinct that restrains individual development.

Transcendental insight is given to outstanding personalities whose emotion can spread, as it were by contagion, and shape cultural history. Occasionally it can also be given to ordinary people. Bergson notes that accounts of mystical experience tend to support one another, and though he grants that the results of such excursions are irreproducible, so are, he claims, the geographical researches of explorers: in both cases, the problem is the difficulty of access to the fields of investigation.[5] Whether or not Nabokov had occasion to read *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (first published in 1932) during or prior

to the composition of *The Gift*, the father of the protagonist of that novel, a biologist and a traveler, an explorer of distant climes, is believed to have access to the mysterious realm of being: "In and around my father, around this clear and direct strength, there was something difficult to convey in words, a haze, a mystery, an enigmatic reserve which made itself felt sometimes more and sometimes less. It was as if this genuine, very genuine man possessed an aura of something still unknown but which was perhaps the most genuine of all"[6] (*Gift* 114). The protagonist of the novel refers to a similar vision of his own in terms of "the constant feeling that our days here are only pocket money . . . and that somewhere is stocked the real wealth from which life should know how to get dividends in the shape of dreams, tears of happiness, distant mountains" (*Gift* 164). One can compare this with Bergson's remarks on writers who succeed in capturing "a unique emotion, an impulse, an impetus received from the very depths of things," perhaps at the expense of "strain[ing] the words" and "do[ing] violence to speech," and thereby enrich humanity "with a capital yielding ever-renewed dividends, and not just with a sum down to be spent at once."[7]

Nabokov's tentative mysticism is frequently analyzed in terms of his consciousness of two worlds, the world of quotidian reality and the "otherworld" from which one sometimes gets "leakings and drafts" (*SM* 35).[8] The latter is the ideal transcendent dimension that can be identified with the "capital" of the protagonist of *The Gift*, or with the destination of Cincinnatus at the end of *Invitation*, or with the source of John Shade's "faint hope" (*PF* 63), or the "Beyond," or perhaps the "hereafter," the door to which comes ajar when one falls in love (*LATH* 25–26). If taken literally, the model of the two worlds contradicts Nabokov's assertion that he is "an indivisible monist" (*SO* 85). In fact, the dualistic conception may be a matter of traditional schemata taken over from the Russian artists of the so-called Silver Age.[9] Yet if one is to make a case for the possibility of subsuming the two-world cosmogony within a monistic vision, one must take into account the twist that also occurs in Bergson's system: inert matter is at certain points transmuted into creative consciousness. Whether this happens at some stage of collective evolution or through the workings of genuine individual memory which Bergson regards as a point of intersection between matter and mind,[10] the result is that the subject and the object become one. The consciousness of the transformation of the duality of the physical and the spiritual into a continuum may be regarded as the metaphysical background of the self-reflexive Möbius-strip narrative structures in most of Nabokov's major novels.

In Bergson's terms creative life is one in which the individual is the author of his or her actions rather than a nexus of social forces or a link in the chain of mechanical determination. Yet Bergson does not completely reject social obligations and customs. His view of the relationship between the individual and society is expressed in a memorable metaphor: "Certain aquatic plants as they rise to the surface are ceaselessly jostled by the current: their leaves,

meeting above the water, interlace, thus imparting to them stability above. But still more stable are the roots, which, firmly planted in the earth, support them from below."[11] The characters of most of Nabokov's novels are exiles who have lost the stability of surface interconnections: they must foster, all the more carefully, the stability of their inner being. Most of the social relationships formed in emigration are meaningless; hence the protagonist of *The Gift* tends to disrupt them in order to maintain his inner freedom. Yet real deracination occurs if the integrity of one's inner being is not cultivated; then the overly determined adherence to the fantasy world of one's own making leads not to freedom but, as in *Despair* and *Lolita*, to madness and crime.

Nabokov seems to have shared Bergson's awareness of the difficulty that lies in the attempts to distinguish authentic vision from aberration, mysticism from morbidity. Perhaps the only major Nabokovian character who successfully combines inner freedom with natural integration in a social frame is John Shade of *Pale Fire*; yet even Shade's cautious mysticism is associated with a cardiac disease—though the significance of his heart attack is a matter of interpretation. Incidentally, Shade's account of the touch of mystery with which a long-sought "right word" demanded by a poem suddenly comes to "perch" on his hand (*PF* 65) is very much in tune with Bergson's view of the relationship between intellectual effort and intuition in creative work. There is a degree of similarity between Bergson's and Nabokov's comments on what happens between the formation of the idea of a concrete work in the mind of the artist and the incarnation of this idea in an artistic medium.[12]

Paradoxically, the Bergsonian idea of time that Nabokov refers to most explicitly may be the one about which he is the most skeptical. Bergson seeks to replace the space-contaminated view of time as a homogeneous medium by the notion of time as pure heterogeneity, a duration or "becoming" of the type that characterizes genuine inner life. In part IV of *Ada* Van Veen is composing an essay "The Texture of Time" as he is driving, through vast spaces, to a reunion with his long-lost beloved. He mentions Bergson twice and indulges in a slightly parodistic play on the language of Bergson's *Time and Free Will* ("Space, the comedy villain, returning by the back door with the pendulum he peddles, while I grope for the meaning of Time"; *Ada* 538); yet Bergson's concepts are here used rather as sources of motifs for rendering attempts to cope with the ravages that aging has produced on the texture of human life: throughout the episode, tactile imagery seems to compete for precedence with the motifs of time. At the end it is Ada's little creative deception which, by deferring the consummation of the reunion, turns the tables on time and brings back the ecstasy that time has endangered. Ada's comment on Van Veen's philosophical probings, "We can know the time, we can know a time. We can never know Time" (*Ada* 563), is in tune with Nabokov's own assertion that "We shall never know the origin of life, or the meaning of life, or the nature of space and time, or the nature of nature, or the nature of thought" (*SO* 45). Nevertheless, the remarks that Bergson makes in *Time and Free Will* on the

interpenetration of the successive states of consciousness[13] provide an apt philosophical background for Nabokov's subtle techniques of handling recurrent images and motifs; whereas the Möbius-strip structures of Nabokov's novels may, among other things, reflect Bergson's suggestions that in individual experience one may go over from the study of mechanical time to the genuine duration, the time lived.

Both Bergson and Nabokov construct private cosmogonies on the basis of similar ethical preferences—for the idea of creative emotion (call it love) rather than for those of the struggle for survival or the will to power.[14] The philosopher has to ground his system in such a way that it may be acceptable to the intellect; the novelist is free from this duty and can devote himself to implementing an understated vision in texts that enact, as well as describe, the spirit's drive to reclaim material reality.

Whether or not there may be an element of wish-fulfillment in Bergson's or Nabokov's constructions of the world, neither is guilty of ostrich-like defenses. Bergson's vision of evil is associated with his belief that the vital impetus works its way forward whether the direction taken is fortunate or not—which sometimes becomes apparent only in retrospect. Translated into sociological terms, the theory of a simultaneous existence of several lines of evolution would mean that a new social structure need not signify progress in comparison with an older one: it may be the "wrong" line of development, one that is bound to wind itself into a dead end. Nabokov's *Invitation* paints a picture of such a line of development at its terminus, where matter becomes "weary," time "doze[s]" (*IB* 43), and the collapse of warped structures almost naturally follows an act of individual defiance. *Bend Sinister*, however, presents the beginning of such a process, where, moreover, the individual trapped in a world that has taken the wrong turn may have been partly responsible for the turn itself: the force that has acquired a grim socio-political shape may at some point have passed through, and thus implicated, the protagonist. The relevance of this view, with its multiple ramifications, to twentieth-century history demands no comment apart from the suggestion that both Bergson and Nabokov would probably have agreed with Alasdair MacIntyre that "What the totalitarian project will always produce will be a kind of rigidity and inefficiency which may contribute in the long run to its defeat. We need to remember, however, the voices from Auschwitz and Gulag Archipelago which tell us just how long that run is."[15]

With determinism and teleology cast aside, one of the issues raised by the idea of lines of evolution passing through any individual is that individual freedom can be exercised to affect their course. However, an individual's constantly renewed self-creation does not suffice, if only because matter weighs one down and creates spots of rigidity, inelasticity, and parasitic growths of obsolete tendencies. Such phenomena are, according to Bergson, an almost infallible source of the comic. Bergson regards comedy as the least purely aesthetic of literary genres: it is, to some extent, a social institution

whose main function is corrective—what provokes laughter is rigidity in human behavior or absurd automatism in the regulation of society.[16] Fear of ridicule is, therefore, an incentive for an individual's elastic adaptation to vital processes and for creative social interaction.

Inelasticity and absent-mindedness can be purely delightful when free from a darker lining, that is, when they are ascribed not so much to individual human beings as to social structures or else to "a negligence on the part of language, which, for the time being, seems to have forgotten its real function and now claims to accommodate things to itself instead of accommodating itself to things."[17] Nabokov's witty word-games may thus be understood, in Bergson's terms, as pointing to momentary lapses of attention on the part of language itself.

"In every human form," writes Bergson, the imagination sees "the effort of the soul which is shaping matter, a soul which is infinitely supple and perpetually in motion, subject to no law of gravitation, for it is not the earth that attracts it. This soul imparts a portion of its winged lightness to the body it animates: the immateriality which thus passes into matter is what is called gracefulness. Matter, however, is obstinate and resists. It draws to itself the ever-alert activity of this higher principle, would fain convert it to its own inertia and cause it to revert to mere automatism. It would fain immobilise the intelligently varied movements of the body in stupidly contracted grooves, stereotype in permanent grimaces the fleeting expressions of a face, in short imprint on the whole person such an attitude as to make it appear immersed and absorbed in the materiality of some mechanical occupation instead of ceaselessly renewing its vitality by keeping in touch with a living ideal."[18] The laughter-provoking display of mechanical elements in human conduct, with all the associated paraphernalia of incongruousness, parasitic growths of the habits of action and thought, blind conventionality, and extravagance, signifies an individual's neglect of some portion of his soul in its relation to others. Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* contains the most hilarious presentation of such tendencies of spiritual impoverishment in the society that victimizes Cincinnatus. By contrast, Nabokov's counter-version of the proverbial "absent-minded Professor" in *Pnin* is a critique of the occasional rigidity in an essentially vital and creative individual, especially when confronted with an unfamiliar culture. Furthermore, *Pnin* in effect qualifies Bergson's view of laughter as incompatible with sympathetic emotion towards its object. This view is explored in Nabokov's earlier novels, *King, Queen, Knave* and *Laughter in the Dark*, where the grim side of ridicule is examined alongside with the vices and failings that call it forth.

The consciousness of the sinister potentialities of modern culture is, in general, more intense in Nabokov than in Bergson, who died in 1941 in Paris, at the age of eighty-one, soon after the Nazi onslaught. In Nabokov's texts, the sense of one's alertness to intimations of the "otherworld," of an "elsewhere"

that is purer and happier than the "realities" in which his characters get trapped, can be regarded as a partial swerve, emotional rather than metaphysical, from Bergson's more placid holistic vision.[19]

Leona Toker

NOTES

1. *A Russian Beauty*, p. 31. On the possibility of Bergson's influence on Nabokov cf. also Boyd, 1990, pp. 109n, 280, and 294–95.
2. Cf. *Gift* 342 and Bergson, 1929, pp. 48 and 88.
3. The relevance of Bergson's distinction between the mechanical and the genuine memory for several passages in *The Gift* is discussed in Toker, 1989, pp. 155–57; this is but one example of indirect commentary that Bergson's works may provide on those of Nabokov.
4. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 284. Subsequent page references to *Creative Evolution* are given in the text.
5. Bergson, 1954, p. 245.
6. Cf. Bergson on intuition hovering like a "vague nebulosity" around "the luminous nucleus" of intelligence (*Creative Evolution* p. 195), or, reversing the light and shade, as "a halo" (1954, p. 249).
7. Bergson, 1954, p. 254.
8. Moynahan (1967, pp. 12–18) discusses the world of *Invitation to a Beheading* in terms of gnostical dualism, noting its conflict with the love of life and of nature that permeates most of Nabokov's works; D. Barton Johnson (*Worlds in Regression*, esp. pp. 155–219) emphasizes Nabokov's two-world model as symbolized by the relationship of the world of the author to that of his tale; and Alexandrov (1991) presents a wide-ranging discussion of the motif of transcendent reality and its relationship with the aesthetic problematics in Nabokov's fiction.
9. See Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 212–34.
10. See Bergson, 1929, p. xii ff.
11. Bergson, 1954, p. 15.
12. Bergson's remarks on the creation of matter (1944, pp. 261–62) and on literary creation (e.g., 1954, pp. 253–54) could be fruitfully compared with Nabokov's descriptions of his own creative process, e.g. *SO* 69.
13. See Bergson, 1948, p. 93.
14. A similar point is made in Pifer, 1980 and 1989.
15. A. MacIntyre, p. 101.
16. Bergson, 1956, p. 90. The relevance of this essay to Nabokov's work was first pointed out in Hyde, pp. 26–31, 44, and 156–60.
17. Bergson, 1956, p. 139.
18. Ibid., pp. 78–79.
19. I am grateful to Professor H. M. Daleski for important remarks on the draft of this essay. I also thank Cornell University Press for permission to include some material from my book *Nabokov: The Mystery of Literary Structures.*

NABOKOV AND BLOK

Vladimir Nabokov's early naive use and subsequent sober revision of the poetic legacy of Aleksandr Blok (1880–1921), the greatest of the Russian Symbolists, is a classic example of what the American critic Harold Bloom calls the "anxiety of influence." That Blok never existed for Nabokov on the same plane as did, for example, Vladislav Khodasevich and Ivan Bunin, poets of an earlier generation whom the young novelist came to know as people and who also provided him aesthetic bearings—though essentially "un-Blokian" or even "anti-Blokian" ones—only underscores how literary and thus complicated this relationship was. What Bloom might term anxiety here need not be fraught with the sort of "one-neurosis-fits-all" Oedipal rebellion and primal scene revelation that Nabokov parodied with such scorn in his notorious *obiter dicta.* All that is meant for our purposes is that the "Blok phenomenon" so permeated the poetic consciousness of the young Nabokov that the latter had to "swerve" almost completely out of the shadow of this powerful precursor in order to find an authentic voice of his own. "Poetic Influence—when it involves two strong, authentic poets,—always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation," writes Bloom.[1] And as Nabokov confided to Edmund Wilson in a letter of January 1943, "I am glad you are studying Blok—but be careful: he is one of those poets that gets into one's system—and everything else seems unblokish and flat. I, as most Russians, went through that stage some twenty-five years ago" (*NWL* 94).

Scholars and commentators up to now have been helpful in pointing out the areas of convergence between Blok and Nabokov, especially with regard to the latter's "Symbolist" and "post-Symbolist" phases. Numerous intertextual parallels have been identified and the Blokian presence has been teased out of Nabokov's works of various periods. If there is a gap in the existing scholarship, however, it resides in the assumption that Blok was somehow easily or straightforwardly "transcended," and that, likewise, the move from lyric poetry to highly layered, metafictional prose did not "cost" the young author much. It is as if we gloss over Nabokov's "be careful" warning to Wilson without giving it its proper weight. Here commentators may have been at least partially taken in by Nabokov's strategic assertions that his gift was formed independently, in supreme confidence and stately isolation from others. It is this cunning subterfuge that needs to be questioned, particularly in the case of Blok as precursor, not in order to undermine Nabokov's real artistic accomplishments or assault his uniqueness or proud independence, but rather to understand better how "constructed" and complicated and, yes, fraught with potential anxiety was his move away from Blok and all the latter represented. In the essay that follows the existing scholarship will be revisited in order to give a proper sense of the impressive incidence and compass of the Blokian influence; at the same time, an attempt will be made to address the authorial

strategies and various formal characteristics attending on Nabokov's quite self-conscious, and in a way self-preserving, swerve away from Blok.

Among the scholars who have treated different aspects of the issue, four have been particularly helpful in presenting Nabokov's "Blokian phase" against the emerging trajectory of his career as prose writer: Gleb Struve, Brian Boyd, Vladimir Alexandrov, and Alexander Dolinin.[2] We shall start with Struve, whose account resonates in interesting ways with Nabokov's own luxuriantly "constructed" version of his poetic apprenticeship in *Speak, Memory*. Struve was, in his well-known *Russkaia literatura v izgnanii* (*Russian Literature in Exile,* 1956), the earliest to see Nabokov's development away from lyric poetry and toward prose fiction with some objectivity and, equally salubrious, at a relatively safe remove from the bitter émigré literary politics of the 1920s and 1930s. With his typical "honesty" bordering at times on truculent sarcasm, Struve fixed on the weaknesses in Nabokov's early poetry—weaknesses that were never entirely overcome *qua poetry* even in maturity.[3] He is particularly hard on the lapses (*sryvy*) in *Gornii put'* (*The Empyrean Path,* 1923) and *Grozd'* (*The Cluster,* 1923), the two books where a derivative Symbolist pathos is most clearly and awkwardly felt. Nabokov, writes Struve, is masterful in his "imitative facility" ("pereimchivost'") and in his ability to don different masks and manners (Fet, Maikov, Pushkin, Bunin, Balmont, Gumilev, etc.), but none of this is really *his*, and for that reason he can on occasion descend into tastelessness (the "poshlost'" the master himself feared like the plague in later work).

To be sure, Nabokov was not unaware of these shortcomings, as his recollections in *Speak, Memory* make clear. He constantly "fell into all the traps laid by the singing epithet," and no matter how hard he tried and agonized over his word choice, "still it would come, that atrocious betrayal" (*SM* 220–21). So much was the young poet under the sway of regnant lexical and prosodic codes that "certain emotions [became] connected with certain surroundings not by a free act of one's will but by the faded ribbon of tradition. . . . It did not occur to me then that far from being a veil, those poor words were so opaque that, in fact, they formed a wall in which all one could distinguish were the well-worn bits of the major and minor poets I imitated" (*SM* 221). Note how Nabokov is as derisive toward this former incarnation as Struve. The poetry fails not only because the speaker is callow and hopelessly "in love with being in love" (the prelude to the "Tamara episode"), but, more importantly, because there is no Bakhtinian "other word" ("chuzhoe slovo"), no authorial point of view *outside of the language*, and thus no way of playing with it, either "up" or "down." The parody and irony that would be so useful as metaliterary tools in the panopticon of the novels' flashing surfaces and camera angles are here helpless in the construction of a unified lyrical (i.e., "singing") persona. There is no "I" in these poems that can exist *on its own*, in the strength of its *bel-canto* urgings, or that possesses, as Iury Tynianov would say, a "history." Nabokov's

retrospective wit seems so bright and buoyant in this instance precisely because the failed poet *already knows* that he will become a master fiction writer.

More to the point, however, it would seem that what Nabokov the poet is in short supply of is no more and no less than Blokian "magic." In commenting on one of the poems ("Fogs flowed by after fogs" ["Za tumanami plyli tumany"]) in *The Cluster* written by Nabokov to commemorate Blok's death, Struve exclaims with some irritation that "here the Blokian intonations are internally justified by the fact that the poem has been written on the death of Blok and consciously adopts his images, but the kinship is purely external—nothing remains of Blok's music in Nabokov."[4] And further on Struve suggests that Nabokov's lines not only lack Blok's "internal music, but also somehow, by their verbal arrangement, are banal and unchaste."[5] What is meant by "unchaste" ("netselomudrenny") is problematic, but probably Struve senses that the "Blokian" notes have been arrived at dishonestly (again, the danger of being a "poet without a history") and for that reason *do not live*. The scholar appears on safe ground when he concludes that Nabokov's remarkable strength as a fiction writer—the "unusual sharpness of his vision of the world in combination with his ability to find, through a visual impression, a maximally adequate expression in a word"[6]—is by the same token his dead-weight as a lyric poet. "Nabokov made the transition from poetry to prose, but about his prose one cannot say what is said about the prose of Tsvetaeva, Osip Mandelshtam, or Pasternak—that it is the prose of a poet. Rather, perhaps, one might say that his verse is the verse of a prose writer. He has some wonderful poetry . . . but in the final analysis something is lacking in it, some sort of ultimate music."[7] It goes without saying that the "ultimate music" ("posledniaia muzyka") referred to by Struve is in all likelihood Blok's.

As Nabokov's biographer, Brian Boyd has given us the ultimate insider's view of his great subject. But precisely because Boyd's view of Nabokov's Symbolist tutelage is at times virtually indistinguishable from Nabokov's own, we are deprived of the spectacle of potential struggle and self-questioning that someone like Struve might be apt to see. For example, Boyd gives a sympathetic reading of Nabokov's *Dvoe* (*The Two,* wr. 1919), an elaborate, 430–line answer to Blok's famous poem of the revolution *Dvenadtsat'* (*The Twelve,* 1918).[8] In it a charming young couple (the scientist Andrei Karsavin and his wife Irina) are first introduced through the playful, urbane musings of a Pushkinian narrator and then, quite unexpectedly, brutally killed when armed peasants break into their estate and drive them defenseless into the winter night. Andrei and Irina are the private and cultivated "two" who oppose Blok's public, marauding "twelve"; theirs is a beautiful and tender world that the inchoate forces of history and revolution take perverse pleasure in destroying. In light of this Pushkinian guerrilla warfare waged on Blok's verse narrative, it would appear that the author's stance in *The Two* is, while "belated," both ethically and aesthetically unassailable: "A rabble's hatred can usher in no new millennium. To Blok's and the Bolsheviks' appeal to the blind desire to tear

down, that destructive rage which seems the antithesis of all culture, [Nabokov] responds by declaring himself ready to stand by Pushkin, Russia at its most cultured and creative and lucid."[9] This is, one recalls, close to the dismissive tone that Nabokov himself used in *Speak, Memory*, when he describes the Russian Revolution as a "trite *deus ex machina*" that played around the edges of his own first love for "Tamara" and ended by causing his "removal from the unforgettable scenery" of his childhood. There, too, the "hot breath of fabulous upheavals" was associated first and foremost with the verse of Alexander Blok (*SM* 229).

But this Boyd-Nabokov version, safely ensconced within the sacred space of Pushkin, is a knight's move. First, the Pushkin of the 1830s, the Pushkin who flirts with flight and madness and death and who is obsessed with the notions of chance and risk *in history*, cannot be reduced to the fixed values of "culture" and "lucidity." This is clearly *Nabokov's* Pushkin, an essentially iconic one, to be mediated over time by Khodasevich's. Second, and equally important, Nabokov is apparently tone deaf to the later Blok and the cacophony of his street music, whose "destructive rage" was aimed not at tearing down just anything, but precisely that smug "culture" capable of sealing off and ignoring the gathering storm. *That* Blok, the Blok who seems to lose himself in, to *merge with*, sound, cannot be appropriated by Nabokov on his own terms. He was, for his generation, the Nietzschean spirit of music, a spirit which is not articulate ("lucid") in a cognitive way and which resists, as indeed Romantic music does, the categories of irony and dialogue. Right or wrong, this *lack of lucidity* was the essence of Blok's lyrical pathos and the point of the poem Nabokov called "dreadful, self-consciously couched in a phony 'primitive' tone, with a pink cardboard Christ glued on at the end." Private paradises were no longer thinkable—that, *in nuce*, was the Symbolist "scourge" Blok applied to the entire intelligentsia—and to himself most mercilessly of all—in his later verse. Blok was least of all worried about whether the tone of his poem was "phony" or "self-conscious"—those are *Nabokov's* strictures, damning from his point of view because he cannot imagine a single personality capable of *hearing* the harmony of that strange music against the counterpoint of its voices.

Thus, Boyd's brilliant portrait may leave out something crucial. The mentions of Blok in *Speak, Memory*, the "raucous note[s]" of his gypsy songs or the images of "[train] tracks . . . bluish bogs, [and] the dark smoke of burning peat," make up the atmosphere of Nabokov's *personal memories* of the Symbolist years, but these are memories almost joyously *emptied* of the historical tragedy and the failed Symbolist project from which they drew life at the time (*SM* 224, 241). It can be said without unfair exaggeration that Nabokov never really knew "Russia," at least in the sense that Blok and his generation did. The cruel lessons of Symbolism are, we are given to understand, effortlessly internalized and then, as it were, cozily domesticated by Nabokov, so that their "art-creating-life" ("zhiznetvorchestvo") excesses fall away en route to the world of the novels: "Symbolism had three main

emphases: the individual as prior to society; second, the independent value of art (art not as a means of addressing social issues of its time and place in a necessarily 'realistic' manner, but art as a series of unique cultural traditions that pose a challenge of innovation on their own special terms); and, third, the role of the artist in indicating a higher reality beyond the sensual world. Nabokov was in sympathy with all three."[10]

This is Nabokov's Symbolism, but it is doubtful whether it is Blok's. The tragedy of Blok's life, which he lived as a poet with a history, was that he did not, after his "Beautiful Lady" phase, consider his own fate as above or prior to society—in fact, Russia, the poet's symbolic "bride," was synonymous with her suffering people, and if she remained unredeemed, then her paladin's quest was a failure. (For the Nabokov of such poems as "K Rossii" ("To Russia," 1921?), "Rossiia" ("Russia," 1919), and the unmistakably Blok-inspired "Rus'," on the other hand, Russia was the site of his paradise lost and the locus for such concepts as family, youth, nature, poetry, first love, etc., but it never entered into his "life of the poet" as a mythical personage *joining public and private meanings.*[11]) Likewise, to argue that art is somehow independent of social issues—non-"realistic," yes, but devoid of social or "humanitarian" commentary, no—is to neglect Blok's middle period, with its urban themes, cheap, ugly locales, and angry factory workers. With his Symbolist maximalism, Blok insisted that the "higher reality" he sensed intuitively as music was no use attaining unless he could drag his long-suffering motherland along with him. Nabokov's wielding of these otherworldly Symbolist themes is more private, particular, and aesthetically purged of social/political "dross" than Blok's. His artistic sight would always insist on difference and distinction, on *not* generalizing and abstracting from a precious instance or instant.

Vladimir Alexandrov provides a new dimension to previous analysis by identifying various Blokian subtexts in Nabokov's early naive verse and then showing how they are reworked and deepened in the later fiction. The early Nabokov, for example, is content to reproduce the "imagery, themes, lexicon, and rhythms" of Blok's poetry, particularly that of the "Beautiful Lady" period, in order to create the impression that his love is "somehow mystically familiar, and fatidically tied to him."[12] Significantly, "Nabokov eschews the apocalyptic undertones derived from Vladimir Soloviev that underlie Blok's verse. Neither is there the mood of mystical despair or abandonment that appears in Blok; by contrast, Nabokov's poems are filled with hope."[13] It is not that Nabokov is without a personal history (after all, he was forced into exile and lost his father to an assassin's bullet—the two events that made his life as marked by the randomness of history as that of any twentieth-century writer). It is that he cannot, as a pure lyric voice, fashion a history that gives freedom and range to his artistic gift. Not only did the poet Akhmatova called the "epoch's tragic tenor" get there first, but Nabokov, with his gifts, could not have arrived there if he had wanted to.[14] It is as if Nabokov, swerving from the apocalyptic Blok, *denies history altogether.* The Russian Revolution becomes a "trite *deus ex*

machina," an episode concocted by an author (Blok?) of penny-dreadful melodramas. Being the ideally suited writer as exile, the creator of presence out of absence and value out of loss, Nabokov could not afford Blok's punishing sincerity. Rather he would have to construct his authenticity, his pathos, through artificiality, through parody, through open-ended prose.

Thus, as Alexandrov perceptively tells us, the parodic treatment of the "prekrasnaia dama" (Beautiful Lady) and "neznakomka" (Incognita) themes in *Lolita* (the vision, the veil, the sound repetitions in the evocative word "charshaf" recalling Blok's magical sibilants) are placed within Humbert's essentially *Symbolist* project of preserving the living Dolly Haze as the perfectly "solipsized" Lolita.[15] Feelings that seem too unguarded or perverse or, most damning, simply banal or "vulgar" are not then the author's but the character's. Nabokov has found a way, *through parody*, to get outside a lyric or elegiac voice and thus to control it. In this way, long after the fact, Nabokov can comment ironically on the Symbolist urge to make life into art. Here of course he follows the Khodasevich of *Nekropol'* (*Necropolis,* 1939), with the important distinction that his friend experienced the Blok mystique as an insider and never questioned Blok's integrity or the genuineness of his tragedy. The most famous *ménage à trois* of the Symbolist era, that involving Blok, Bely, and Blok's wife Liubov' Mendeleeva, can be deflated and "Americanized" as the Humbert-Quilty-Lolita triangle. And Nabokov can even suggest Blok's complicity in the plot by making him Quilty's anagrammatic collaborator—"Vivian Damor-Blok"—in the Russian version of *Lolita*.[16]

Blok can be seen then, retrospectively, as a kind of evil genius or "dark bloom," as in the English anagram—the Baudelaire of "Harmonie du soir" or, more likely in this case since this is where Humbert's troubles begin, the Poe of "Annabel Lee," whose dark, haunting sounds become an imprisoning echo chamber always ready to fetishize a prior "beautiful lady" and engulf "lucidity." Once again, in this context Blok is meant to seem ethically and aesthetically the opposite of Pushkin, the bright genius of *The Gift*, whose hero bears a surname (Godunov) thick with Pushkinian notions of genuine fatherhood versus imposture.[17] What is lost, however, to the prose writer's belatedness, is the *heroic* quality of Blok's quest: his psychomachia gave the impression of being larger than one life, more than personal fantasy, and the unreproduceable sound of the verse and the biographical death that mysteriously followed the end of the "music" were all the proof necessary of their authenticity. When the chivalric codes of Blok's early verse were theatricalized in his middle period, that is, shown to be unrealizable in life other than as play-acting or posing, the result was *tragedy*. When the same chivalric codes (borrowed from Blok) of Nabokov's early verse are likewise theatricalized in his mature work (e.g., *Invitation to a Beheading*), the result is *comedy*, or liberation from "history."

Alexander Dolinin has written the most thoughtful and informed study of Nabokov's relation to Blok to date.[18] Not only has he indicated the existence of more Blokian subtexts in Nabokov than heretofore thought, he has done a

splendid job of explaining, in context, how these instances may be made to comment on the specific nature of the younger writer's "anxiety of influence." Dolinin shows, for example, how the "here"/"there" ("tut"/"tam") thematic complex in *Priglashenie na kazn'* (*Invitation to a Beheading*) points to a series of Blok lyrics and how the ending of the novel, including the dismantling of the stage decorations, parodies the ending of Blok's drama *Balaganchik* (*The Puppet Booth,* 1906). He also identifies the presence of "Incognita" motifs in the important episode in *Ada* when the hero meets Lucette in a restaurant. Extremely interesting is Dolinin's hypothesis that Nabokov moved back the time of his last meeting with Tamara on a train in *Drugie berega* (*Other Shores*) and *Speak, Memory* to early summer 1917 so that his recollection of the "bluish bogs" and "the dark smoke of burning peat" could dovetail with Blok's similarly castastrophe-laden descriptions in his diary entry of 16 June 1917 and in two related poems (*SM* 241).[19] In other words, Nabokov was probably willing to adjust his personal history in *Speak, Memory* in order that it appear more aesthetically satisfying or "fatidically marked."

With the aid of Dolinin's analysis, we are at last able to peer into the psychological wellsprings of Nabokov's uneasiness about Blok. Blok gradually becomes for Nabokov an "'evil genius' of the new poetry" precisely because he has "ruined its taste" (much like the Chernyshevsky of *The Gift!*) and "cultivated its passion for the falsely romantic pose" and "the oppressive and misty complex of feelings."[20] But is "taste" really the right word for what Blok has "ruined"? And what pose does Nabokov have in mind that is not "falsely romantic"? Blok at some level, despite his gift, was perceived by Nabokov as a false and demonic lunar father figure—the exact opposite of his own "lucid" biographical father and of Pushkin, the "sun" of Russian poetry. That Nabokov was reading Blok's Florence cycle to his mother on the night his father was assassinated may have confirmed this demonic connection. Nabokov and his mother loved these poems, were intoxicated by their sounds, yet perhaps there was something "indecent" or "uncontrollable" in their charm. If Blok's acoustic blurriness and impressionability had not "authored" the Revolution and unleashed the chaotic politics that led to his father's death, then the least that could be said was that, riding *inside the storm*, Blok had given it focus and voice. *He gave structure to sound if not sense*—that was why he was so potentially dangerous. Against the sun of Russian poetry, who could say in the famous omitted chapter of *Kapitanskaia dochka* (*The Captain's Daughter*) "God preserve us from a Russian revolt, senseless and ruthless," there arose this specter, this winged "Gamaiun" (or mythical "Sirin" creature), who dared to make poetry out of revolutionary street medley and whose self merged with the Van'kas, Kat'kas, and Pet'kas.

Thus Nabokov was not able to exorcize this demonic spirit and pure id of Russian poetry until he, as Dolinin shrewdly points out, passed into the realm of "prosaic poetry" and, finally, prose: "As Nabokov's verse of the period 1923–30s attests, the rejection of Blok is not limited to declarations but

involves the transformation of the entire poetic system: the lexicon is prosaicized and purged of Symbolist clichés, direct intonational and thematic echoes of Blok disappear, and the lyrical hero gradually yields his place to the ironic narrator."[21] Only in prose could Nabokov make virtue of necessity (his lack of "Blokian music") and comedy out of tragedy (the loss of his homeland and his father with which Blokian music had become associated). That is why "poetry"—including Fyodor's juvenilia and the concealed *Onegin* stanzas—is always set in and brought alive by a prose framework and why Pushkin's prose, beginning with *The Journey to Arzrum* that serves as model for the elder Godunov-Cherdynstev's trips to the east, is at least as much in evidence as his verse. That is also why the "return" of the father as well as the father's beneficent otherworldly guidance of the son must fall within the semantic zodiac of Pushkin.

The apocalyptic history associated with Blok's songs and the politically motivated murder of V.D. Nabokov has been banished from the fictional father's biography with a mighty proleptic stroke of the banished son's pen. It has become, to use the writer's own belated and deheroicized phrase, nothing more than a "trite *deus ex machina*." *The Gift*, then, is Nabokov's ultimate statement about his place, fully constructed, in the only history he admits as "real"—that of Russian literature. In this history the sun must shine, poetry must be prosaicized, and music must give way to vision. Only in *Lolita*, and for a radically different audience, can the "American" Nabokov safely rewrite the plot of *The Gift* from its lunar underside.

David M. Bethea

Notes

1. Bloom, 1973, p. 30.
2. Struve, 1956, pp. 163–72; Boyd, 1990, pp. 93–94, 156–57; Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 215–17; Dolinin, "Nabokov i Blok." See also Rampton, 1991, and "In Search"; and G. Smith, 1991. The standard biography of Blok is Pyman, *Distant Thunder* and *Release of Harmony*.
3. Though a much fairer and more objective critic, Struve seems to echo a criticism first voiced by Zinaida Gippius who, when shown some of Nabokov's early (c. 1916) love poetry by the young man's literature teacher, Vladimir Gippius, asked Nabokov's father to tell him that he "would never, never be a writer" (*SM* 238). Note that Nabokov uses the word "writer" in *Speak, Memory*, a word which would clearly prove Gippius to have been wrong; if, however, the word "poet" is allowed to replace the word "writer," which seems sensible in context, then the "nasty" Gippius ("*zlaia* Zina" was Gippius' nickname) turns out to have been right.
4. Struve, 1956, p. 168; Nabokov, *Stikhotvoreniia*, pp. 181–82.
5. Struve, 1956, p. 168.
6. Ibid., p. 170.
7. Ibid., pp. 170–71.

8. Intriguingly, Nabokov's work was never published. See Boyd, 1990, pp. 156–57.
9. Boyd, 1990, p. 157.
10. Ibid., p. 93.
11. See Nabokov, *Stikhotvoreniia*, pp. 64, 169, 308. Blok's poetry is particularly stronglyfelt in Nabokov-Sirin's early verse whenever the locale surrounding St. Petersburg is evoked. Here the chronotopic elements of Nabokov's world-and-word picture—the prerevolutionary *years* coupled with the Nabokov family *estates and environs*—inevitably merge in a Blokian *atmosphere*, to quote *Speak, Memory* again, of "black fir, white birch, peatbogs, hayfields, and barrens" (229).
12. Alexandrov, 1991, p. 216.
13. Ibid.
14. With few exceptions, the great lyric poets (Akhmatova, Pasternak, Mandelshtam) who would follow in Blok's footsteps and bond tragically with the Soviet epoch had, as they correctly assumed, to remain at home at all costs.
15. Alexandrov, 1991, p. 217.
16. Ibid.
17. I have been aided in the following discussion of *The Gift* by Monika Frenkel Greenleaf's fine essay "Fathers, Sons and Imposters: Rereading Pushkin's Trace in Nabokov's *The Gift*."
18. Dolinin, "Nabokov i Blok."
19. Ibid., p. 36.
20. Ibid., p. 38.
21. Ibid., p. 41.

NABOKOV AND CHATEAUBRIAND

An edition such as Alfred Appel's *The Annotated Lolita* points to the range and extent of literary allusions involved in the fabric of Nabokov's fictions. In Nabokov's own words, elements in *King, Queen, Knave* "represent a deliberate tribute to Flaubert," while *Speak, Memory* avows kinship to *À la Recherche du temps perdu* (*KQK* x, ix). Indeed, Nabokov might even have become a French writer, and his works often pay more or less overt tribute to other French authors besides Proust and Flaubert.

Described by Nabokov as the "greatest French writer of his time,"[1] François René, Vicomte de Chateaubriand, rather than simply the source of allusions in and influence on Nabokov's writings, is the interlocutor of an intertextual dialogue whose figures and functions the present article will examine in Nabokov's most chateaubriandesque novel, *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*. And though the significance and ramifications of this dialogue may vary in intensity and breadth, its inevitable outcome will be to expand (both spatially and temporally) the semantic field of both texts.[2]

At the beginning of part 1, chapter 5, of *Ada*, Van Veen, the novel's hero and narrator, is seated in a hackney coach spinning along a winding, dusty

country road in the direction of Ardis Hall, his cousin Ada's home and birthplace. One more hamlet ("Gamlet"), one more bridge flanked by birches, one more scenic glimpse and, just round the next turning: "the romantic mansion appeared on the gentle eminence of old novels " (35). As expected, the romantic mansion is Ardis Hall (or Manor), and as suggested, its aspect is such as best suits a venerable literary landscape. For, if a Romantic mansion needs a metaphor to emerge out of distinguished old books, it is also true that the only place where a romantic mansion can literally stand is on the slope, or hill, of a novel. This is, of course, particularly "true" if the "last turning" that leads to the manor involves a page as well as a road. In short, *Ada*'s fictional nature and background are explicitly avowed as soon as the reader is introduced to its main locale, its focal focus, the *ardis* at the center of its heart.

Like Ardis Manor, *Ada* is a romantic novel, or, as Van Veen puts it, a "rambling romance" set within a literary landscape which is at once its own grounds (a resonant park) and its referential background. *Ada* begins with a genealogy and ends with a blurb—the way of all flesh, be it merely a book's. What goes on in between, however, is not just the story of certain characters but, more than that, the creation of their story and the story of their creation—genesis in a mirror. *Ada* is a novel's novel in the most literal sense of the expression. Van remembers, and out of his memories creates a new present, a new text; but Van's past is also the reflected, "remembered" past of the text, *its* own paradise regained. Indeed, as he parenthetically notes soon after his arrival, "the place swarmed with ghosts" (36). Like an echo, ghosts occur whenever the present reverberates with the past, whenever *Ada* evokes its own "ancestry," its tradition, and its previous avatars: the "intertextual" frequencies, the innumerable references to previous texts and authors with which its discourse is fraught, and with whose tones it fairly resonates.

While one could say that all texts are more or less dependent on intertextual dialogue, there are certain works that draw their significance, indeed their very being and aesthetics, out of the deliberate and methodical ways in which they include other texts within their own discourse. Parody, pastiche, plagiarism, translation, citation, etc.—which may be located as particular figures within the broader tropological spectrum of intertextuality—establish such an intricate dialogue between Nabokov's novel and the writings of Chateaubriand.

The first allusion to Chateaubriand's work occurs when the reader is told that Daniel Veen, Van's uncle and Ada's putative father "spent only a few carefully shaded summer weekends at Ardis, his magnificent manor near Ladore" (5). *Ladore*: this is allusion at its most elusive. The allusive sign, stripped of all obvious connections with its original context, is incorporated into the new text, where it is most likely to pass unnoticed unless rescued by the eye of the reader. It is not the repetition of its mention that will lend greater resonance to the county, but rather its proximity to two new allusions, the name Lucile ("Marina had flown back to her rehearsals of 'Lucile,' yet another

execrable drama heading for yet another flop at the Ladore playhouse" [15]) and the sudden spectral appearance of a "ruinous black castle on a crag" (35) (later, but only later, identified as Bryant's castle), moreover corroborated by a third as, on Ada's twelfth birthday, Lucette (another Lucile) bursts into a "St. Malô fisher-song" (81). Neither of these allusions is sufficiently precise in itself to evoke a certain referent, but if the contiguity of Lucile (the name of Chateaubriand's sister), the ruins of a somber manor (much like Chateaubriand's ancestral home, Combourg), and St. Malô (the sea-rocked cradle of most of his childhood) is yet not enough to conjure the lost paradise of *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (Chateaubriand's autobiography), the next two references will accomplish the task.

At the beginning of chapter 14, the reader finds Van in possession of a copy of *Atala*: this is the only direct reference to Chateaubriand's novel in *Ada*, but what that reference involves far transcends its casual appearance. As noted in the author's preface to the first edition of his novel, *Atala* is "a kind of poem, half descriptive, half dramatic, where everything consists in the depiction of two lovers walking and talking in the midst of solitude."[3] Van and Ada could also be described as two lovers who walk in the solitude of an ancestral park which resounds, much like the New World forests of *Atala*, with Edenic implications—not least of which is incest.

In the case of the *Culex chateaubriandi* Brown commemorated towards the end of chapter 17, the allusion to Chateaubriand implicit in the insect's name is only diffused by the fact that the insect's first captor, Charles Chateaubriand, "was not related to the great poet and memoirist born between Paris and Tagne (as he'd better, said Ada, who liked crossing orchids)" (106). The very denial strengthens the allusion (with a direct reference) and invites further investigation. As it turns out, *culex* is no mere bug: *Le Petit Larousse* defines it as the scientific name of the mosquito commonly named *cousin*, the name that Chateaubriand gives to the greedy pests in his *Mémoires*.[4] With a mere shuffle of its letters "insect" spells "incest" and the avid cousin (much like Ada's putative one, *son semblable, son frère*) becomes suddenly more worthy of the name of its alleged captor—*chateaubriandi* Brown.

The next direct reference to Chateaubriand ("In a story by Chateaubriand about a pair of romantic siblings, Ada had not quite understood when she first read it at nine or ten the sentence '*les deux enfants pouvaient donc s'abandonner au plaisir sans aucune crainte*'" [133]; "therefore the two children could make love without any fear" [596]) is strengthened by the proximity of another intertextual figure, a close kin, *citation*. Like reference, and unlike allusion, citation acknowledges the otherness of the cited pre-text: a foreign, distinct voice is included or interpolated into the continuing discourse. The two texts are thus made to coexist in reciprocal illumination, each transforming the other according to its own need. In the case at hand, this transformation is stressed by the fact that the cited sentence is not Chateaubriand's. This particular misquotation definitely heightens the already pronounced incestu-

ous inflections of Chateaubriand's work—whether *Atala*, *René*, or *Mémoires*, or all three—all "stories" about a pair of romantic siblings walking and talking in the woods.

Speaking of romantic siblings, at the beginning of the same chapter, the reader is informed that Ada's "intimacy with her *cher, trop cher René*, as she sometimes called Van in gentle jest, changed the reading situation entirely" (131)—as indeed, it does. Ada's appellation of Van is a direct citation from Amelie's letter to her brother René at the end of *René*,[5] but citation at its least explicit, almost verging on plagiarism, while courting allusion. Here the text shades imperceptibly into the pre-text whose language it assumes while barely hinting at its "otherness."

Both forms of citation are fused in Ada's poem, involving a double sisterly invocation immediately following the account of *Culex chateaubriandi* Brown's capture: "*Mon enfant, ma soeur / Songe à l'épaisseur / Du grand chêne à Tagne; / Songe à la montagne / Songe à la douceur*—" (106; "my child, my sister, think of the thickness of the big oak at Tagne, think of the mountain, think of the tenderness—" [595]). In this short poem, Chateaubriand's, or René's, sister is "crossed" with the *soeur* of Charles Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au voyage." The three central lines are a pastiche of the second and third lines of Baudelaire's poem[6] built on, and including an allusion to, Chateaubriand (supposed to have been born between "Tagne" and Paris) and his romance "Le Montagnard émigré" ("The Exiled Mountaineer"). The two external lines are a direct citation of the first two lines of "L'Invitation au voyage."

In part 2, chapter 5 of *Lolita*, Humbert Humbert remembers how, as a European child, he envisioned the Appalachian mountains: "glorious diamond peak upon peak, giant conifers, *le montagnard émigré* . . . in his bear skin glory." There is very little in Humbert's words (besides maybe an earlier mention, in Chapter 1 of the same part, of "stone cottages under enormous Chateaubriandesque trees") that would alert the reader to the fact that "*le montagnard émigré*" is not a Swiss hermit but rather the title of the above-mentioned romance by Chateaubriand. Seven lines of the same lyric, untitled and unattributed, appear again embedded within a larger poem, at the beginning of part 1, chapter 22 of *Ada* (138–39).[7] The only two lines which are preserved intact, and hence constitute plagiarism are to be found in the third stanza of both poems ("*Ma soeur, te souvient-il encore / Du château que baignait la Dore?*"). The remaining twenty lines are either translations or pastiches of the original seven.[8] Whereas in plagiarism the text quite simply identifies with the pre-text, and whereas in citation it avails itself of the original's voice to corroborate its own semantic necessities, in *translation* (as might be gathered from Nabokov's own definition of the three main categories of translation)[9] the dialogue between text and pre-text—meeting as it were on equal grounds—simultaneously involves the semantic, the syntactic and the phonetic dimensions of both texts. In its absolute subservience to the form and sonority of the

original, *pastiche* shares some of the characteristics of translation but none of its responsibilities as it overtly shuns any semantic obligation.

The original romance ("Le Montagnard émigré") appears in the novel *Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage*, where it is sung by one of Don Carlos' war prisoners, Lautrec, a melancholy French aristocrat. It is quite interesting to note that even in its "original" context the song is conceived as a pastiche of sorts, the verbal recasting of an old tune. Even though the story of the last Abencérage has very little in common with *Ada*, the two texts present a few minor but noteworthy parallels. For instance, Aben-Hamet is the last descendant of the Moorish tribe of Abencérage, kin to that of the Zegris, both of which are commemorated in the names of the two houses that publish Van Veen's *Letters from Terra* (342). Nor is it by coincidence that the name of the little red boat Van and Ada use on the blue Ladore is *Souvenance*, the last word in the first line of the original poem.

Lucile Chateaubriand, as evoked in the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*,[10] shares with Ada, the same "pale, impermissible skin," the same "long black hair cascading" over frail shoulders, the same dark "serious eyes" restlessly shifting from sky to earth, from gloom to fire (in Van's words, "her pallor shone, her blackness blazed" [58]), the same slender "disjointedness" of limbs ("a skinny little girl, too tall for her age, with lanky arms, looking shy"),[11] the same proneness to dream and poetry. Like Ada, she also has a brother, François-René, with whom she walks and talks under the aching old oaks and giant elms of the ancestral park over which hovers Bryant's Castle, or Bryant's Château,[12] their home.

"However, what would we be, without memory?" Chateaubriand wonders at the beginning of his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*; "Our existence would be but the successive moments of an endlessly flowing present; there would not be any past left. O misery! our life is so vain as to be but a reflection of our memory."[13] Though this passage is obviously relevant to the text within which it appears, its last words acquire added significance if applied to *Ada*, Van's "forbidden memoirs," a work which, even more than *Mémoires*, exists exclusively as reflection—of itself, of its past, of its own reflections, and, as if this were not enough, reflection of *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* itself, and its reflections. The most immediately noticeable aspect of *parody* is repetition. The text repeats, or reflects another text within its own discourse and, in fact, builds its discourse on that very reflection. It is not just the language of the text or its rhythmic presence that parody imitates, but rather, and primarily, what these evoke: characters, situations, motifs, themes, a story. Implied by and inherent to parodic reflection are both reconstruction and exaggeration and, of course, memory. Ada and Lucile share more than looks, books, moods, and problematic brothers: they share a childhood, a park, and memories of both.

Both *Ada* and *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (and *René* for that matter), are concerned with the reconstruction, the re-creation of a past, seen at once as the narration of a "family chronicle," the regaining of a "lost paradise," and a means

to transcend both time and death. Significantly, both texts begin with a somewhat protracted genealogical background. Also significantly, the first part of both texts (and the only one where they can be said to overlap) centers on the late childhood and adolescence of "two sweet siblings" (a wild sullen brother and a pale, fatal sister) in their private Eden: Ardis for *Ada*, Combourg for *Mémoires*,[14] and an anonymous "paternal castle" for *René*.[15]

"I do not remember what *Les Enfants maudits* did or said in Monparnasse's novelette," Van interjects as the movie script of the novel is being discussed at a nearby poolside, "they lived in Bryant's château, I think, and it began with bats flying one by one out of a turret's *oeil-de-boeuf* into the sunset" (205). Though it is not bats but owls and martlets that flit among the towers of Combourg at dusk or on moonlit nights,[16] and swifts that circle the dark ruins of Bryant's Castle in *Ada*, Mlle Larivière's novel, however foggily recalled by Van, seems nevertheless to emphasize the distinct Chateaubriandesque tones that filter, with great verve, through the first part of *Ada*.

The shadow of incest, although only a shadow, hovers darkly over the whole of *René*. As Nabokov himself describes it in his notes to his translation of *Eugene Onegin*: "René contemplates suicide, but Amélie comes and saves him [. . .]. A subtle perfume of incest permeates their relationship: "cher et trop cher René. . . ." She leaves him for a convent. [. . .] After a wonderful visit to the country estate where they had lived, and a description of her consecration (at which she admits her "criminelle passion"), René sets out for America."[17] "*Cher, trop cher René*," as mentioned earlier, is how Ada often addresses Van, just as she is herself referred to as "René's sister" (131, 199). But, unlike Amélie, Ada never withdraws to a convent to flee the "criminal passion" that draws her to her brother; quite the contrary.

Parody allows for fulfillment and paves the way for transcendence. Van's and Ada's incestuous bliss is a reenactment of François's dream, the Edenic vision of the *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*,[18] his "nymphe," his "sylphide," at once the exacerbation of the tacit tension in the first part of the *Mémoires*, conveniently fused (and confused) with the central conflict of *René* and its apotheosis. But like so many other things in *Ada*, an inverted apotheosis, because in *Ada* the tension (and the dream) begins with the fulfillment of desire, the actualization of the mirage: "Ada and he were sunbathing on the brink of the Cascade, and his nymphet had bent over him and his detailed desire. [. . .] At ninety, Van remembered his first fall from a horse with scarcely less breathlessness of thought than that first time she had bent over him and he had possessed her hair" (140–41). This scene is repeated four summers later: "They saw themselves standing there, embraced, clothed only in mobile leafy shadows, and watching the red rowboat [*Souvenance?*] with its mobile inlay of reflected ripples carry them off, waving" (216–17).

It is these memories, those summers, that suddenly reemerge out of Van's past to revamp the paling fire of his passion some forty years later as, from the balcony of his hotel room in Mont Roux, he watches an aged Ada voluptuously

scratch her plump thigh, one balcony below. Such an instance of what Proust will later term "mémoire involontaire" also occurs in *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* as François-René, now nearly fifty is suddenly yanked out of his reflections and plunged into deeper ones by the warble of a thrush: "Instantly, this magic sound represented before my eyes the paternal domain. . . ."[19] But if Van's "madeleine" is not "le gazouillement d'une grive," it is nevertheless embodied in another markedly Chateaubriandesque figure, his ravenous "cousin," *Culex chateaubriandi* Brown. This is what Van actually sees as he watches Ada, one balcony below his: "Pensively, youngly, voluptuously, she was scratching her thigh at the rise of the right buttock: Ladore's pink signature on vellum at mosquito dusk" (562).

Annapaola Cancogni

Notes

1. *Eugene Onegin*, III, p. 98.
2. For more on the theorization of intertextuality, see Shklovsky; Cancogni, 1985.
3. *Atala, René, Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage*, hereafter referred to as *Atala*, p. 6: "une sorte de poème où tout consiste dans la peinture de deux amants qui marchent et qui causent dans la solitude."
4. *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, I, p. 293; and VI, p. 243; hereafter referred to as *Mémoires*.
5. *Atala*, pp. 222, 224.
6. This interpolation, supported by the mention in the text of "Charles" (also Baudelaire's first name) Chateaubriand, allows for an alternative reading which would see all five lines as a *Baudelairized* pastiche of Chateaubriand.
7. Compare with *Atala*, pp. 316–18.
8. For an in-depth analysis of these, see Cancogni, 1983.
9. *Eugene Onegin*, I, pp. vii-viii.
10. *Mémoires*, I, p. 119.
11. Ibid., p. 33: "une petite fille maigre, trop grande pour son âge, bras dégingandés, air timide."
12. On the origin of this name, cf. *Mémoires*, I, pp. 16–17.
13. Ibid., p. 69. "Et néanmoins, sans la mémoire que serions-nous? Notre existence se réduirait aux moments successifs d'un présent qui s'écoule sans cesse; il n'y aurait plus de passé. O misère de nous! notre vie est si vaine qu'elle n'est qu'un reflet de notre mémoire."
14. Ibid., p. 120.
15. *Atala*, pp. 186–87.
16. *Mémoires*, I, p. 116.
17. *Eugene Onegin*, III, p. 100.
18. *Mémoires*, I, pp. 118, 125, 126, 130.
19. *Mémoires*, I, p. 103. "A l'instant, ce son magique fit reparaître à mes yeux le domaine paternel . . . ."

NABOKOV AND CHEKHOV

Recalling in a 1964 interview the books he "relished especially" between the ages of ten and fifteen, Vladimir Nabokov listed a number of English, French, and Russian writers. Among the Russians, he named, in this order, Chekhov, Tolstoy, and Alexander Blok. His great love for Pushkin, he went on to say, came later, between the ages of twenty and forty (*SO* 43). This early commitment to the writings of Anton Chekhov continued for a lifetime, as is illustrated in Nabokov's calling him "my predecessor" in a 1956 letter to Edmund Wilson (*NWL* 297). The attachment finds its ultimate confirmation in "Anniversary Notes" (1970), where Nabokov proclaims his great love for Chekhov while stating that he is unable to rationalize this feeling the way he can his admiration for the greater literary art of Lev Tolstoy. After an obviously unfair summary of Chekhov's work as "a medley of dreadful prosaisms, ready-made epithets, repetitions, doctors, unconvincing vamps, and so forth," Nabokov concludes with the lyric confession: "yet it is *his* works which I would take on a trip to another planet" (*SO* 286).

There are a number of evident affinities between these two authors which bind them and at the same time place them outside the traditions associated with Russian literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The most striking is of course their respective early immersion in the biological sciences, Chekhov through medicine and Nabokov through lepidoptery. One of the best contemporary Russian Chekhov scholars, Vladimir Kataev, has pointed out that Chekhov's views on both medicine and literary art were formed under the impact of the lectures of his professor of medicine, Grigory Zakhar'in, who stressed the importance of studying not the generality of an illness but the particular impact of a given injury or infection on each individual patient. Kataev shows how Chekhov extended this individualized approach from medicine to literature, firmly rejecting the standard thinking and stereotypes in both areas.[1] As a mature writer, Chekhov was to express particular pride at having managed to describe accurately the sensations of a woman undergoing a miscarriage in "The Name-Day Party" and of an attack of acute depression in "A Nervous Breakdown."

In an early programmatic Russian poem, bearing the English title "Biology," Nabokov portrayed himself dissecting a linden leaf and a "crucified frog" in a laboratory, and then returning with his newly gained knowledge to his room, where poetry and his muse await him.[2] Decades later, he was to reassert this position in one of his interviews: "Only myopia condones the blurry generalizations of ignorance. In high art and pure science, detail is everything" (*SO* 168). It is this respect for details and facts that accounts for Chekhov's insistence on getting the correct botanical and popular names of a plant he saw growing on Sakhalin and his fascination upon learning that one of the mongooses sold to him in India was actually a palm civet; and this is what led Nabokov to object to Walter Arndt's and Robert Lowell's confusion of flea

with roach, aspen with ash, wolfhound ("volkodav") with a wolf, and pine trees with firs in their translations of Pushkin and of Mandelshtam into English.

Both Chekhov and Nabokov recognized the importance of of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, though they differed in the degree to which they accepted it.[3] Chekhov went to the extent of characterizing his sensation at reading *The Origin of Species* as "voluptuous." In the biography of Nikolai Chernyshevsky which forms a part of *The Gift*, Nabokov shows how the revolutionary writer's predilection for sweeping generalizations not backed by any factual research or knowledge, led him to accuse Darwin of impracticality; this was the same Chernyshevsky who blindly assumed that the biota of Eastern Siberia, where he lived for some fifteen years, was identical to that of European Russia.

Chekhov's and Nabokov's respective early familiarity with natural science and biological theory does not of itself explain their shared isolation within much of the Russian literary tradition. One can cite in the nineteenth century the example of Konstantin Leont'ev and in the twentieth century that of Mikhail Bulgakov, two writers who also acquired a medical education before devoting themselves to literature. But Leont'ev and Bulgakov, for all their vivid individualities, convey clear sociological and religious positions in ways that Chekhov and Nabokov do not. In the writings of Chekhov and Nabokov, one cannot find any easily paraphrasable philosophical, sociological, or theological theories or viewpoints. Not that they ignored such things. Vladimir Kataev's assertion that Chekhov was averse not to philosophy and progress, but to revered platitudes, not to hopes and ideas, but to wishful illusions,[4] may be equally applied to Nabokov.

In the never-ending search for the correct equation between life and literary art that has for two centuries been central to Russian literature, Chekhov and, after him, Nabokov turned their gaze in a direction most of their countrymen would not have thought of looking. In a letter to his publisher friend Aleksei Suvorin of November 3, 1888, Chekhov pointed out the similarity of the basic laws that govern natural processes and artistic creation: "We know that nature has a, b, c, do, re, mi, fa, sol, and curves, straight lines, circles, squares, green, red, blue. We know that all this in a given combination will yield a melody or a poem or a picture, just as simple chemical elements in a given combination yield a tree or a stone or the sea, but all we know is that they are combined; yet the principle according to which they are combined is concealed from us. Anyone who is at home with the scientific method senses intuitively that a piece of music and a tree have something in common and that both the one and the other are created in accordance with identically regular and simple laws. Hence the question of what these laws are."[5]

Chekhov was to return to this complex of ideas one year later, in 1889, in one of the surviving fragments from his unrealized novel that bore the provisional title *Stories from the Lives of My Friends*. One of the protagonists muses on the relationship between nature and artistic creation: "After all,

poetry and all the so-called fine arts are also the kind of awesome, miraculous phenomena of nature which we should learn to explain without waiting for them to explain something to us. What a pity and how offensive that even intelligent, good people consider such phenomena from a particular, prejudiced viewpoint that is much too personal. Travnikov, for example, is tormented by the particular question of God and the aims of life. The arts do not solve this problem, do not explain what lies beyond the grave. For this, Travnikov regards them as a prejudice, and reduces them to the level of mere entertainment without which one could easily manage [. . .]."[6] In his 1966 interview with Alfred Appel, Jr., Nabokov ridiculed C.P. Snow's assertion of the unbridgeable gap between the two supposedly separate cultures, the literary and the scientific ones. Nabokov maintained that natural science has its artistic side and that the arts require scientific truth: "I certainly welcome the free exchange of terminology between any branch of science and any raceme of art. There is no science without fancy, and no art without facts" (*SO* 78–79).

One expects that both Chekhov and Nabokov would have agreed with the insight of the Russian poet resident in California, Nikolai Morshen, expressed in several of his poems, that creative imagination is just as much a part of nature as organic life and inorganic matter: "Udariat trizhdy v bereg vody, / I trizhdy kriknut petukhi, /Chto nuzhno zhdat' k zime priploda, /Chto liudi, zveri i stikhi — /Vse brat'ia, vse odnoi porody, /Ne prikhot' — no zakon prirody, / Ee uspekhi, ne grekhi."[7] ("Thrice will the waters strike the shore, /And thrice will the cocks crow, /That new offspring is to be expected by winter, /That people, beasts and poems /Are all brothers, all of the same species, /Not nature's whim, but her law, /Her successes, not her sins.")

The ability to regard imaginative literature and their own artistic talent as a phenomenon of nature was what absolved both Chekhov and Nabokov from the endemic sense of guilt which Russian writers felt when they did not put their art in the service of some sociological, political, theological or, perhaps, personal cause. One need not reach back all the way to the great precedents of Gogol and Tolstoy, who at the end of their respective literary paths sought to give up writing fiction so as to help their fellow men to find the path to God by some other means (and failed spectacularly). It should suffice to cite three major writers who were Chekhov's junior and Nabokov's senior contemporaries. Maksim Gorky strove to prove with his art that both the ruling classes and the bourgeoisie are corrupt and that the revolutionaries will reform human nature through an infallible political recipe. Ivan Bunin used his talent to show that love (or, more likely, sex) and death are inextricably linked in human existence; this continued during his emigration with the additional emphasis on how awesome and overwhelmingly vivid life was in pre-revolutionary Russia. Aleksei Remizov (the writer to whom the formula for literary art which Nabokov has applied to both Franz Kafka and Anton Chekhov—"beauty plus pity"—is surely pertinent) concentrated on the pain and squalor of human life,

although he saw to it that the texture of his books was a joy for the reader because of the way he took the Russian language back to its pristine, vibrant, pre-Petrine sources.

No comparable guiding ideas or principles are to be found in the writings of either Chekhov or Nabokov. This is what led to the remarkably parallel negative reception of their work—of Chekhov's by the radical utilitarians of the 1880s, then by some of the turn-of-the-century Symbolists, and of Nabokov's by the émigré critics of the 1930s and again by certain English and American writers after he had acquired a reputation in the West. The recognition of each writer's magnitude by their senior colleagues (of Chekhov's by Tolstoy, Leskov, and Korolenko and of Nabokov's by Bunin, Khodasevich, and Zamiatin) was accompanied by a steady chorus of critics of the most diverse stripe decrying each writer's lack of human warmth, cruelty toward his characters, and general aimlessness of his art.[8] Dmitry Merezhkovsky's charge that Chekhov "undermines and destroys all the beliefs, ideas and idols of the Russian intelligentsia" (1907) was echoed in 1934 in Georgy Adamovich's claim about Nabokov: "All of our traditions are severed in him." There is an almost hallucinatory recapitulation of the 1904 comparison of Dostoevsky to Chekhov by Zinaida Gippius, for whom Dostoevsky represented the warmth, spirituality, and humanity of Russian literature, while Chekhov stood for the cold of death, emptiness, and indifference, in the similar comparison by the American novelist Joyce Carol Oates of Dostoevsky and Nabokov. Oates could not have possibly known the 1899–1904 essays by Gippius on Chekhov, but in 1973 she, too, wrote that whereas Dostoevsky "lavished love on everyone" (how about the French, the Poles, or the Jews, one wants to shout), Nabokov "exhibits the most amazing capacity for loathing that one can find in serious literature, a genius for dehumanizing [. . .]."[9]

Setting up the chauvinistic, ultra-nationalistic, and arch-reactionary Dostoevsky as a paragon of human warmth and love which Chekhov and Nabokov supposedly lack can only appear willfully perverse to anyone who knows the three writers' biographies and output in depth. To quote from the poetry of Morshen again: in his "Epistle to A.S." [i.e., Pushkin] this poet laments the disdain of Russia's "national genius" for human rights and "overt liberty" and asks whether this represents his people's "natural shortcoming / Which is of use only to tyrants."[10] And indeed, could it be Chekhov's and Nabokov's cosmopolitanism and commitment to individual liberation (qualities that held little attraction for many major Russian writers, ranging from Fonvizin and Gogol to Bunin and Solzhenitsyn) that caused so many Russians and Westerners to approach them with so much suspicion?

As has been indicated so far, Anton Chekhov's outlook on life, society, and art was highly congenial to Vladimir Nabokov. But what was it that Nabokov could have learned as a literary artist from the older writer? Chekhov's main discoveries in the sphere of narrative structure stem primarily from his

aversion to ready-made devices and stereotypes of every sort. In a letter of advice to his brother Alexander on how to write fiction, he wrote, among other things, "audacity and originality: flee the stereotype" and "may God protect you from the commonplace."[11] In a relatively early story, "Agaf'ia" (1886), a railroad switchman, returning from work in the morning, finds out that his wife had spent the night with her lover. He goes searching for her and runs into her as she is about to cross a small stream on her way home. The last page of the story tells of Agaf'ia's inner struggle as she tries to walk toward her husband while her lover watches but offers no help. The story ends with the words: "Agaf'ia suddenly stood up, shook her head and bravely walked toward her husband. She had apparently gathered her strength and made her decision."

When the story first appeared, some Russian critics maintained that Chekhov had no right to end the story at that point: the reader had the right to know whether the husband killed Agaf'ia or gave her a beating or cursed her or forgave her. But as later critics, Charles Du Bos among them, pointed out, Chekhov's story depicted the attraction that a certain type of handsome idler (Agaf'ia's lover) holds for women and how women allow themselves to be used by such men. As to the ultimate reaction of the husband, whether violence, forgiveness, or any other variant, *that* had been shown in too many earlier works of literature and Chekhov rightly felt no need to spell it out. It is from such structures in Chekhov that Nabokov must have learned to end his narratives at unconventional points: Anton Petrovich devouring a ham sandwich, too terrified to learn the real depth of his disgrace in "An Affair of Honor" ("Podlets"); or the recently wed, recently widowed Chorb (in "The Return of Chorb") about to be discovered by his indignant in-laws with a prostitute in a hotel room, under circumstances which the reader understands but which the protagonist couldn't even begin to explain.

Also shared between Chekhov and Nabokov is the device of having an egomaniac as either the narrator or a major character. Totally egomaniacal are the protagonists of Chekhov's stories "The Princess" ("Kniaginia," 1889) and "The Wife" ("Zhena," 1892). The first of these stories, told in the third person, is a portrait of a woman who lives in a self-created illusion that she is kind, loved, and needed, but whom the reader comes to see as imperceptive, self-centered and a constant source of discomfort for everyone around her. "The Wife" is told in the first person by the smug, authoritarian husband, who gradually learns from others that the wife he thinks inept and in need of his guidance, is widely admired for her efficient work on organizing a relief agency to help the peasants during a famine. Others in Chekhov's gallery of egomaniacs are Professor Serebriakov in the play *Uncle Vania*, Kovrin in "The Black Monk," and, most probably, Laevsky in the early portions of "The Duel." The self-absorption of Chekhov's egomaniacs, their inability to see the life around them except through their own subjectively-warped optics, may have provided the model for the egomaniacs in Nabokov, above all for Hermann Karlovich

in *Despair*, Kinbote-Botkin in *Pale Fire*, and, more remotely, Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*.

Hermann's high opinion of his own abilities, combined with his lack of perception of what is going on around him, is quite close to the mentalities of, respectively, the princess and the husband in Chekhov's "The Princess" and "The Wife." Hermann is sure of the love and loyalty of his wife and friends, just as Vera Gavrilovna in "The Princess" believes that the abbot and the monks of the monastery she visits have missed her and are overjoyed at her arrival. In reality, her visits are for them a source of fear and inconvenience. When the physician in her employ threatened some of Vera's illusions about herself and her role in the world, she dismissed him. The physician's long and angry monologue during Vera's visit to the monastery about her bad treatment of people around her and the sham nature of her charities upsets her but fails to get through to her. The function of the doctor's monologue in the story is analogous to Ardalion's letter to Hermann in *Despair*. Like Vera Gavrilovna in Chekhov, Hermann and Kinbote get to hear some harsh truths about themselves in the course of the novels in which they appear. Like her, they simply think that people are being unpleasant to them, failing to understand the justice of what they're told.

Pavel Asorin in "The Wife" is quite sure that his legalistic approach is superior to his wife's impulsive emotionalism and that her famine-fighting efforts would be doomed without his guidance. Hermann, likewise, sees his wife Lydia as simple minded and as putty in his hands. The reader knows better: Lydia is carrying on an extramarital affair with Ardalion, which her self-absorbed husband cannot perceive, and she will not be of much help to him in his criminal projects. Hermann realizes that he is a failure both as an artist and a criminal at the end of the novel, but he has not understood Lydia, Ardalion, and the other people around him any better than at the beginning. Most of Chekhov's and Nabokov's egomaniacs cannot break through the shell of their selfishness: not Vera Gavrilovna, not Professor Serebriakov (both in *The Wood Demon* and *Uncle Vanya*), not Hermann and surely not Kinbote. But a few do break through this shell to knowledge and better self-understanding: Pavel at the end of "The Wife," Laevsky at the end of "The Duel," and Humbert, who perceives at the end of *Lolita* that he has deprived his beloved of her childhood and bought his gratification at the cost of her suffering.[12]

One of Chekhov's most original literary discoveries was that an announced or anticipated major event *not* happening could be as effective dramatically as if it had come to pass. Throughout *The Cherry Orchard* the reader or spectator expects Lopakhin to be married to Varya, because they both so clearly want it. In the last act they are deliberately left alone, so that the proposal can be made. Nothing happens, and the sight of Varya, left alone and weeping quietly, is much more arresting than the expected and familiar outcome would have been. These cancelations of the closure are worked out by Chekhov with considerable care. Even so, some of his literary associates

claimed not to understand why, for example, when Laevsky had been trying to run away from his mistress Nadezhda for most of the action of "The Duel," does he feel such love and need for her at the end of the novella. A careful reading of the text and of the Pushkin poem used as an epigraph to one of the final chapters shows that the night of anguish before the duel and the narrow escape from the bullet during the actual encounter made Laevsky realize that Nadezhda was the only person he had in the world. Her earlier infidelities to which, as he sees now, she was driven by his own behavior, do not matter in the face of his newly discovered love.

In Chekhov's most carefully crafted piece of fiction, "A Woman's Kingdom" ("Bab'e tsarstvo," perhaps more exactly rendered as "A Kingdom of Women," 1893), the wealthy heiress has a chance to escape from her loneliness and isolation through marrying a pleasant factory foreman she meets in the first section of the novella. This gradually becomes a possibility in the following sections. In the very end, however, the protagonist gives up this plan because of a chance remark made by an ignorant and snobbish servant, whose opinions she herself holds in contempt. Yet the annulment of the expected outcome is not aleatory—it is prepared by the gradual exposition of the protagonist's character. Such a sudden, last-minute switch away from the expected ending is most striking in the first and most Chekhovian of Vladimir Nabokov's novels, *Mashen'ka* (1925, translated as *Mary*). The independent-minded and strong-willed Ganin has expended considerable ingenuity and effort to arrange a reunion with his one-time sweetheart, now married to another man and due to arrive in Berlin from the Soviet Union. But during the six days prior to her arrival, Ganin was achieving a Nabokovian (rather than a Chekhovian) existential project of affixing in his memory their earlier love. So, at the last moment, instead of going to the station to meet her, he leaves Berlin for good. As in Chekhov's "The Duel" and "A Woman's Kingdom," a careful re-reading of the text from the beginning will establish the motivation for the absence of the expected closure. The entire action of Nabokov's play *The Event* (*Sobytie*, 1938) hinges on the circumstance that the "event" of the title, expected by the characters for three acts, could not possibly occur, as is made clear in the final scene.

The abandonment of the protagonists' plans or their failure to achieve these plans, a usual plot strategem in Chekhov, is also frequent in Nabokov. Martha will not succeed in murdering her husband in *King, Queen, Knave*, Luzhin will not escape from the world of chess in *The Defense*, the protagonist of *Pnin* will not get to keep his job at Waindell College and Charles Kinbote will not convince any sane reader that John Shade's poem is about Kinbote's imaginary kingdom. The psychological and circumstantial causes for such failures are worked out with consummate art by both writers. An instructive comparison can be made between the fate of the servant Firs (the Russian version of the Greek name Thyrsis, a derivation quite ironical within the

context) in the last act of *The Cherry Orchard* and the leitmotif of the misplaced keys in Nabokov's *The Gift*.

The loyal old Firs is a relic from the times of serfdom, a system he understood and accepted. When the family house and orchard are sold, arrangements are made for the ailing Firs to be sent to a hospital, where he can die peacefully. The young Ania inquires about Firs and is informed by the insolent young butler Yasha (who despises Firs for his old-fashioned ways) that he told someone to take care of the matter. Ania asks the clerk Epikhodov to check it, but Yasha gets angry that his assurance is not enough. Then Varya asks about Firs and is also told he's in the hospital. A few scenes later, the owner of the estate, Mme Ranevskaia, wants to know whether Firs has been taken to the hospital. Ania, who has heard three times that he has, assures her mother that Yasha—of all people—has taken care of Firs. When everyone leaves and the house is boarded up, Firs comes in. It turns out he's been left to die alone in the locked house. His abandonment is not only highly symbolic but also very carefully prepared.

The theme of keys in *The Gift* is nowhere as sad as the death of Firs, but it is worked out with equal care. At the end of the first of five chapters, the poet Fyodor, returning to his new dwelling late at night, sees that he had brought a wrong set of keys and is unable to enter. While waiting to be rescued, he has the idea for one of his best poems. In the middle of the novel, he confesses his love for Zina while they are both waiting inside a dark entrance to the house, each with a set of keys. In chapter 5, the theme of keys takes on a life of its own. Fyodor's set of housekeys is stolen, together with his clothes, while he is swimming in a lake. Next day, Zina's family are moving away, which should enable Fyodor and Zina to consummate their by now full-blown love affair. But in the eventful last pages of the novel, information is casually slipped in that Zina's and her mother's keys are locked in the apartment, that the janitor will not be able to unlock the door for them, and that Zina is counting on Fyodor's keys, now stolen, to reach the place where their happiness will be achieved. An inattentive reader may miss all this and be quite sure that, as the lovers approach the house and the prose of *The Gift* switches to verse reminiscent of *Eugene Onegin*, the novel will end on the tonic chord of a familiar happy end. The final poetic lines warn that the story isn't quite over—and indeed, Fyodor and Zina, out in the street late at night, without keys or money are in the situation of the protagonists in the last line of Chekhov's "The Lady with the Little Dog": "and it was clear to both of them that the end was still far away and that what was most complex and difficult was only beginning."[13]

Other attitudes and structures that unite Nabokov to Chekhov could be cited. So could some of their shared themes: the varieties of death of perplexed older men, the theme that stretches from Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" to Chekhov's "A Dreary Story" and "The Bishop" and from there to Nabokov's dying forgotten poet Podtyagin in *Mary* and the death of Alexander

Yakovlevich in *The Gift*. There are also all those selfish women who ruthlessly use the men who love them: Chekhov's two "unconvincing vamps," as Nabokov termed them, "The Spouse" ("Supruga," 1895) and "Ariadna" (same year), plus his Natasha from the play *Three Sisters*. These women are comparable to the much larger gallery of their Nabokovian counterparts that range from Martha in *King, Queen, Knave* and Magda (Margot in translation) in *Kamera obscura* all the way to Liza Bogolepov in *Pnin*. (Both Chekhov and Nabokov also depict *men* who use women.)

With all the enumerated parallels, Chekhov and Nabokov are in many ways different writers. Their differences resemble the ones outlined by Koncheyev in his second imaginary conversation with Fyodor in *The Gift* (though in the novel the disagreements and affinities refer to the relationship between Nabokov and Vladislav Khodasevich and though on the subjects of Dostoevsky, Flaubert, neo-Voltairianism, and athleticism, Chekhov would be on the same side as Fyodor and Nabokov). The part of Koncheyev's statement that best applies to the Chekhov–Nabokov connection is the one that begins "you and I differ in many things" and continues, "very mysteriously and inexpressibly, a rather divine bond is growing between us" (*Gift* 341) or, in Russian, "krepnet dovol'no bozhestvennaia mezhdu nami sviaz'."[14]

Simon Karlinsky

NOTES

1. Kataev, pp. 87 ff.
2. *Gornii put'*, p. 55.
3. On Nabokov's view of Darwin, see Alexandrov, "A Note on Nabokov's Darwinism . . ."
4. Kataev, pp. 167 ff.
5. Chekhov, *Pis'ma*, III, p. 53. English version cited from Karlinsky, *Anton Chekhov's Life and Thought*, p. 121.
6. Chekhov, *Sochineniia*, VII, p. 515. English translation by the author.
7. Morshen, 1976, p. 30.
8. On the initially hostile reception of Chekhov's writings, see Karlinsky, "Russian Anti-Chekhovians," pp. 183–202. On the reception of Nabokov's writings by the critics of Russian emigration, see Struve, 1956, pp. 278–90, and Davydov, *"Teksty-Matreshki" Vladimira Nabokova*, pp. 37–51. On the critical reception of Nabokov both in emigration and in America, see Roth, 1984, pp. 1–38.
9. On the comparison by Zinaida Gippius of Dostoevsky and Chekhov, see Karlinsky, "Russian Anti-Chekhovians," pp. 186–187; Joyce Carol Oates on Dostoevsky and Nabokov, see her essay "A Personal View of Nabokov."
10. Morshen, 1979, pp. 75–78.
11. Chekhov, *Pis'ma*, I, p. 242.
12. On Nabokov's moral view of Humbert Humbert, see Boyd, 1991, pp. 232 ff.
13. Chekhov, *Sochineniia*, X, p. 143.
14. *Dar*, p. 383.

NABOKOV AND DOSTOEVSKY

We all know that Professor Nabokov in his *Lectures on Russian Literature* at Cornell University gave Dostoevsky a C plus or D minus in literature, that is to say described him as a writer of the second rank, "with flashes of excellent humor" and "wastelands of literary platitudes in between" (98). "He was a prophet, a claptrap journalist and a slapdash comedian. I admit that some of his scenes, some of his tremendous, farcical rows are extraordinarily amusing. But his sensitive murderers and soulful prostitutes are not to be endured for one moment—by this reader anyway" (*SO* 42). God knows that Dostoevsky was not the unique target of Nabokov's animus. Pasternak, for example, also became his bugbear, his "bête noire," and for similar reasons: sentimentalism and "poshlost'" (philistinism) in *Doctor Zhivago*. "John the Simpleton," that "product of a nation which has more than one nation's share of misery," as Nabokov says ironically, was according to the Cornell Lectures the real prototype of Prince Myshkin, the protagonist of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, much more than Don Quixote or Christ (*LRL* 103). And the same is true of Zhivago, whose name means "the Living" in Russian, but whom Nabokov calls everywhere, especially in *Ada*, "Mertvago," or "the Dead" (53).

In *Strong Opinions*, Nabokov speaks of "the recurrent eavesdropping device in nineteenth-century Russian fiction" (68). This, of course, applies mainly to Dostoevsky's novels, where the device is indeed quite frequent. Techniques of second-rate detective thrillers and cheap psychology of the abyss, trivial religious images—everything that Nabokov hates—are epitomized in Dostoevsky's fiction. The only work that finds favor in Nabokov's eyes is *The Double*, not because it relates to the theme of the "Doppelgänger" ("the double") which, says Nabokov, is "a frightful bore," but because it is an obvious and shameless imitation of Gogol's "The Nose" (*SO* 83–84). Incidentally, Sartre's review of *Despair* which was republished in his book *Situation I* underlines not only Nabokov's use of that theme, but also emphasizes the influence of Dostoevsky on Nabokov's novel, which provoked Nabokov's infuriated and scornful answer to the French critic: behind the latter's "loose type of writing, which has been popularized by many second-raters—Barbusse, Céline and so forth," as Nabokov maliciously suggests, "looms Dostoevski at his worst, and still farther back is old Eugène Sue, to whom the melodramatic Russian owed so much" (*SO* 229).

In spite of his overt distaste for Dostoevsky, we may say that, on closer scrutiny, Nabokov in his work demonstrates not only a very detailed knowledge of Dostoevsky's themes and patterns, but even a hidden influence (of which Sartre had no real notion). In this matter, at first glance, and as is usual with Nabokov, details prevail over general ideas. Nabokov for example mocks the American translator who, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, misunderstood "*medok*" as "hydromel" instead of "Médoc," the French wine; at Zossima's not hydromel, but good old French wine was served (*SO* 86).

Parodies of Dostoevsky are most evident in the novel *Despair*, already mentioned. *Despair* was written in 1932 in Berlin, and its first draft was entitled *Zapiski Mistifikatora (Notes of a Mystifier)*, a hint at *Zapiski iz podpol'ia (Notes from Underground)*, and at Nabokov's main intention, which is to mystify the reader, be it at the expense of Russian literature.[1] Sartre was right, *Despair* is a parody of Dostoevsky's plot pattern. *Despair* tells the story of a would-be perfect crime: a man called Hermann lures a tramp called Felix, who is his double, into organizing a fake car accident for the large insurance payment it will provide. He deceives the tramp and kills him, but a gross blunder makes his crime easily recognizable. Borrowing somebody's identity is a game that is badly played in *Despair*, whereas in Dostoevky's world it is a psychological trend, a temptation for many heroes, because they are not sure of their own identity. An overall permeability of conscience pervades *Crime and Punishment*. Raskolnikov's ego is fragile, even though he would like to be another Napoleon; he finally finds salvation in repentance, an epilogue absolutely alien to Nabokov.

"'Mist, vapor . . . in the mist a chord that quivers.' No, that's not verse, that's from old Dusty's great book *Crime and Slime*. Sorry: *Schuld und Sühne*" says Hermann in a sort of posthumous confession, after the crime and after he has found a temporary refuge in the French Pyrenees (*Des* 177). Later on he mentions "a grotesque resemblance to Rascalnikov (*Des* 189)." Dostoevskian grim and scorning diminutive words are easily recognizable too, even if they are forged by Nabokov. For example "nadryvchik," a word coined with a very Dostoevskian notion, "nadryv" ("hysteria"), the title of a chapter in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Or a word like "strastishki" in the expression "*strastishki* k literature" ("*small ugly passions* for literature"). In chapter 4, the parody of an epistolary novel is also a hint at Dostoevsky, especially his first novel, *Poor Folk*. The same is true of the numerous hints at the mouse in that same novel, which are explained by the fact that Nabokov ironically calls *Notes from Underground* "Notes from the Mousehole," especially in *Ada*. One may add that Hermann's rival, the vulgar Ardalion, reminds us of Gavrila Ardalionovich, the no less vulgar rival of Prince Myshkin. As for the detail that betrays Hermann, the cane, "palka," it is reminiscent of the famous "palka o dvukh kontsakh," the "stick that strikes both ways," at Mitya Karamazov's trial.

In *Despair* the theme of the double, or the "Doppelgänger," is parodied in a degraded form, that of the "doubleur," or understudy on stage. Felix is a bad "understudy" of Hermann, and Hermann a bad "understudy" of Felix. Moreover, the whole plot of *Despair* is like a parody of Dostoevsky's incredible plots with their incredible coincidences. (A parody, not a satire: "Satire is a lesson, parody is a game," as Nabokov once said [*SO* 75]). Nabokov even parodies Dostoevsky's stylistic tics, which have been analyzed by many commentators (especially Bitsilli). The scene in a pothouse between Felix and the narrator in *Despair* is an obvious parody of the Dostoevskian cabaret scenes, such as the one between Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov: "Chto-to uzh slishkom literaturen

etot nash razgovor, smakhivaet na zastenochnye besedy v butaforskikh kabakakh imeni Dostoevskogo; eshche nemnogo i poiavitsia 'sudar',' dazhe v kvadrate: 'sudar'-s'."[2] The English version is not an exact translation, but it may be useful to compare the two: "There is something a shade too literary about that talk of ours, smacking of thumb-screw conversations in those stage taverns where Dostoevski is at home; a little more of it and we should hear that sibilant whisper of false humility, that catch in the breath, those repetitions of incantatory adverbs—and then all the rest of it would come, the mystical trimming dear to that famous writer of Russian thrillers" (*Des* 88).

Dostoevsky ridiculed as "our national Pinkerton" ("otechestvennyi Pinkerton," *Otchaianie* 85–86; changed to "that famous writer of Russian thrillers" in the English translation), and as "our national expert in soul ague and the aberrations of human self-respect" (*Des* 88) is omnipresent in *Despair* as a sort of intellectual mock stage-setting, but he has no monopoly on being mocked. So are Gogol (there is a literal quotation from *Dead Souls* in chapter 5), Leskov and his story "The Left-hander," Pushkin. In his quest for a title for his Notes, Hermann thinks of "Poet i Chern'," an allusion to Pushkin's famous poem "Poet i tolpa," since his crime is a sort of poem (chapter 11). In other words, *Despair* is both a parody of gloomy Dostoevskomania ("mrachnaia dostoevshchina," "dark Dostoevskian stuff") (*Otchaianie* 196; *Des* 205), and a game with Russian literature, as nearly all of Nabokov's novels are.

Is Nabokov more "Dostoevskian" than he wants us to think? As an amateur of intricate plots, he is in a way very "Dostoevskian." In Dostoevsky's "thrillers" he dislikes the philosophical and religious message. But he appreciates the plot. Many other novels have reminiscences of Dostoevsky. In *Glory* Martin is pleased by the infatuation of the Germans with Dostoevsky (162). In the last scenes, when Darwin is looking for Martin, who has already gone to Russia for his "exploit," he thinks he is hidden between the wardrobe and the wall, the very place in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* where Kirilov hides himself when Verkhovensky looks for him. A hero called Rakitin reminds us of an unpleasant friend of Rodion Raskolnikov's in *Crime and Punishment:* "The literary burrow-burrow brotherhood is well represented. Rakitin, for instance, the journalist, you know, the one that sports spats" (*Glory* 177).

Rodion is the name of the warder in *Invitation to a Beheading*, which has often been understood as anti-utopian. It is in fact anti-utopian, but it is also filled with echoes of Dostoevsky, including a parody of Dostoevsky's biography. Waiting for one's execution could be called the primal scene in the author's own legend and psychology. It is a theme that Dostoevsky himself borrowed not only from life, but also from literature (Victor Hugo's *Les derniers jours d'un condamné à mort* [*The Last Days of a Condemned Man*]).

Kamera obskura (*Laughter in the Dark*) is a sort of "cheap" Dostoevskian thriller, culminating in a scene of moral torture and mockery between the blind man, the whore and the cynical lover, the Dostoevskian "triangle" *par excellence.*

King, Queen, Knave is also Dostoevskian in its outrageous dramatism, its focus on a pathological "triangle," and the failure of the attempted murder, as in Dostoevsky's *The Eternal Husband.* In *Despair,* too, there is a parody of one scene from *The Eternal Husband*: Felix and Hermann both pretend to be asleep: "He listened, that was certain. I listened to his listening. He listened to my listening to his listening" (*Des* 96).

Nabokov's dislike for "poshlost'," philistinism, and its garments of fake religion only grew in his American years. In *Pnin*, the President of Waindell College, "renowned for his use of the *mot juste*," calls Russia (to which the narrator refers as "that torture house") "the country of Tolstoy, Stanislavski, Raskolnikov, and other great and good men" (136). "Great and good men" alludes to the Greek notion of "kallagathia," which in its Russian variety celebrated the preeminence of ethics in art (symbolized by the word "pravda"—truth). Tolstoy, the "truth-seeker," and Stanislavsky, the founder of "true theater," are quoted by their names, but Dostoevsky only by the name of his abhorred hero.

In *Look at the Harlequins!*, Nabokov mentions his contempt for "'serious' cinema (depicting heartrending problems with a political twist)" (61), a definition that fits very well his conception of Dostoevsky, in particular *The Possessed.* The latter also suddenly appears at the end of a malicious and even venomous paragraph in *Ada*: "blurbs boosting *The Possessed* by Miss Love and *The Puffer* by Mr. Dukes" (343). In *Look at the Harlequins!* (99–101), the reader is offered a mock résumé of *The Gift* (called here *The Dare;* in Russian "gift" is "dar"). A famous chapter of *The Gift,* which was cut by the editors of the émigré journal where it was first published, consisted of a very malevolent biography of the radical thinker Chernyshevsky. In his mock résumé Nabokov substitutes Dostoevsky for Chernyshevsky: "Inset in the middle part . . . of the book my Victor wrote 'on a dare' . . . is a concise biography and critical appraisal of Fyodor Dostoevski, whose politics my author finds hateful and whose novels he condemns as absurd with their black-bearded killers presented as mere negatives of Jesus Christ's conventional image, and weepy whores borrowed from maudlin romances of an earlier age" (100). As can be seen from this excerpt from Nabokov's last published novel, Dostoevsky is still the "bête noire" par excellence.

Nabokov was fond of playing cruel games with Russian literature at the expense of ignoramuses. These resemble games at fairs where puppets are bombarded one after the other by the player. One after the other celebrated authors fall down. Dostoevsky was the main target in that game (equalled by Freud on another plane), and Nabokov repeatedly mocked his "Bedlam turned back into Bethlehem" (*Gift* 72), that is, the reverse conversion of lunatic asylums and brothels into religious symbols ("Bedlam" comes from "Bethlehem," so this is the way back). Only a few details, he says in *The Gift*, are to be saved: "In the 'Karamazovs' there is somewhere a circular mark left by a wet wine glass on an outdoor table. That's worth saving" (72–73).

There is of course no poem by Nabokov dedicated to Dostoevsky as there is to Tolstoy.[3] But one major work is, in my view, a sort of indirect tribute as well as mock response to Dostoevsky, and that is *Lolita*. Sexual intercourse between an adult man and an adolescent girl is at the very heart of Dostoevsky's main project, "The Confession of a Great Sinner," a project that has exploded into different novels, mainly *The Possessed*. Stavrogin's confession to Bishop Tikhon is the core of the novel, although it is not included in the canonical text. Humbert Humbert's confession, written in fifty-six days in jail, is in a way the Nabokovian answer to Dostoevsky. However Lolita is not as innocent as Matrena in *The Possessed*, and Humbert is not as guilty as Stavrogin. In fact the girl is the seducer, and no Tikhon is needed in Nabokov's novel. The drama around Lolita is philosophically much simpler than around Matrena. No *Crime and Punishment*, no *Schuld und Sühne*, only sex as a secondary sign of art. Incidentally, the central scene in "The Enchanter" as well as in *Lolita* is yet another reminiscence of *The Eternal Husband*: sexually excited Humbert Humbert bending over Lolita asleep, and all of a sudden wondering whether or not she is awake.

Lolita—Matrena, in these contrasted figures of nymphets may lie the secret of Nabokov's obstinate distaste for a writer from whom he borrowed, be it in parodical way, so much of his own literary technique.[4]

Georges Nivat

Notes

1. This detail, which comes from Nabokov's archives, is given by Boyd, 1990, p. 383.
2. *Otchaianie*, p. 85. Hereafter, references to the Russian text will be given above as (*Otchaianie*, page number).
3. *Rul'*, September 16th, 1928. Cf. *Nabokov, Cahiers de l'émigration russe*, 2, Paris, 1993, p. 35.
4. For additional studies of Nabokov's relations to Dostoevsky, see J. Foster, 1993; Connolly, "Madness and Doubling," 1991; Katherine O'Connor, 1989; Connolly, 1986; Connolly, "The Function of Literary Allusion"; Davydov, "Dostoevsky and Nabokov." See also the article on *Despair* in this volume.

NABOKOV AND EVREINOV

There is evidence suggesting that Nabokov's thought and writings may have been influenced by the original, although little-studied, Russian playwright, director, historian, and theoretician of the theater Nikolai Nikolaevich Evreinov (1879–1953). Given Nabokov's later denigration of the idea of influence, it is remarkable that in 1925 at an émigré ball in Berlin Nabokov acted the role of Evreinov himself in a mock trial of his play *The Chief Thing* (*Samoe glavnoe*,

1921), which was then enjoying a great success throughout Europe. Nabokov is reported to have been made up to look like Evreinov and defended the play's message that happiness can be achieved when life is transformed into theater.[1] Nabokov's willingness to take on this role necessarily suggests some familiarity with Evreinov's ideas, as well as at least a degree of sympathy with them, at least at the time. (It is noteworthy, however, that the existential act of theatralizing life in Evreinov's sense is not a theme in Nabokov's fictions or an aspect of his worldview in his discursive writings.) Nabokov also apparently met Evreinov once and lived near him for a while in Paris in 1939.[2] But as in the case of Nabokov and Petr Uspensky (q.v.), the most important consideration is that Evreinov's writings and ideas were widely available and known throughout Europe at the very time when Nabokov was maturing as a writer.

Perhaps the best-known aspect of Evreinov's legacy is his idea that the world of nature is filled with "artificial" theatricality, which underlies his iconoclastic view of the theater as a completely natural institution.[3] The examples he adduces include such phenomena as a cat playing with a mouse and the mouse's feigning death in order to escape (7), desert flowers that look like stones (p. 11), elaborate dances performed by birds in areas they specially prepare for that purpose (15), and the like. Virtually all forms of human behavior are also characterized by play acting: the inevitable hypocrisy of social intercourse (65), the stratagems of courtship and carnal desire (79), and the prescribed forms of behavior in religious life (103).

Evreinov also refers specifically to mimicry among butterflies as further proof of his claim that theater exists in nature: "You see a little protruding spot on the trunk of a tree; but no sooner do your fingers touch it than it separates from the trunk and flies away sparkling with bright colours of its lower wings which have been concealed beneath the dark-grey, cork-like upper wings" (p. 11). Like Nabokov and Uspensky, Evreinov interprets the phenomenon in his own, anti-scientific way (although without reference to Darwin, which is an important difference): "mimicry may be not only a special case of convergence, as naturalists claim, but a special stage of theatrical development as well. This assertion is pregnant with inferences [sic] of the highest import to the philosopher, including the revaluation of the very concept of 'naturalness'" (14; see the article "Nature and Artifice").

There are also resemblances between Nabokov's and Evreinov's conceptions of the origins of art. For Evreinov the fact that children play at make believe of their own accord "proves that nature herself has planted in the human being a sort of 'will to the theatre'" (36); the child's "independent, individual, wholly arbitrary creation of a new reality from the material furnished by the outside world is a form of creative energy to which no other adjective than 'theatrical' can be applied" (37). Nabokov expressed a similar view in an interview when he spoke about the causal relationship between universal deception in nature and the birth of poetry: "Do you know how poetry started? I always think that it started when a cave boy came running

back to the cave, through the tall grass, shouting as he ran, 'Wolf, wolf,' and there was no wolf" (*SO* 11).[4]

Moreover, in his 1937 lecture on Pushkin, Nabokov provides a description of theater in everyday life that sounds exactly like Evreinov. "Who on earth," he asks, "can be this artist who suddenly transforms life into a small masterpiece?" And then he goes on to describe "how many times, in a city street, I have been dazzled by this miniature theater that unpredictably materializes and then vanishes. . . . I have watched comedies staged by some invisible genius, such as the day when . . . I saw a massive Berlin postman dozing on a bench, and two other postmen tiptoeing . . . to stick some tobacco up his nose. I have seen dramas. . . . Not a day goes by that this force, this itinerant inspiration, does not create here or there some instantaneous performance. . . . One would therefore like to think that what we call art is, essentially, but the picturesque side of reality."[5]

Evreinov's conception of natural theatricality leads him in a direction similar to Nabokov's and Uspensky's—a belief in a transcendent spiritual reality that is the cause of the multifarious forms of artifice on earth. "The name of my God is Theatrarch," Evreinov proclaims; "My intuitive premonitions and my philosophic knowledge tell me that man in his spiritual being is immortal and cannot disappear like a bubble. For my face and body are but masks and garments in which the heavenly Father has clothed my ego, sending it to the stage of this world where it is destined to play a certain role." Evreinov goes on to express faith in metempsychosis, and in his God as "the aboriginal source of everlasting transformation of all things living" (128). The end result of the millions of reincarnations that Evreinov believes are his destiny is that he will "get close to Him, my Stage Manager, until, perfectly trained in the cosmic series, I shall become His inseparable and worthy associate" (131).

The implicit parallel that Evreinov draws between his God and himself as creators in this passage (a parallel he makes explicitly elsewhere: "It is in the theatre, if anywhere, that man . . . becomes a Creator" [8]), together with Evreinov's opposition to realistic theater in favor of underscored artificiality on the stage, are especially relevant for Nabokov, who often underscores the fictiveness of his novels. But the close resemblance between their ideas should not be allowed to obscure the fact that conceptions of the artist as a rival of God and of man's artistic creations as analogues to God's natural world have a venerable tradition in European culture, especially among the Romantics and their heirs, the Symbolists, who, it should be remembered, were active in Russia concurrently with Uspensky and Evreinov (see the articles on Nabokov, Bely, and Blok). The idea of life being a stage is of course even older than the Romantics. It receives its most famous expression in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (Act II, Scene vii), and, as Evreinov himself points out, can also be found in Erasmus and Marcus Aurelius (*The Theatre in Life*, 46–47).

The similarity between Nabokov's ideas about artifice in nature and those of Evreinov and Uspensky obviously complicates the issue of determining

influence. (It is also possible that Uspensky and Evreinov could have influenced each other, beyond what is implied by Uspensky's footnote about Evreinov in *A New Model of the Universe*, p. 45). Be that as it may, the resemblances are still useful for identifying trends in the history of ideas to which Nabokov appears to belong.

Vladimir E. Alexandrov

NOTES

1. A brief note about this incident was published by "A. A.," together with a blurred reproduction of a photograph purportedly showing Nabokov and the other actors. (A clearer reproduction of this photograph appears in *Evreinov: Foto-biografiia*, p. 47; Nabokov, although not specifically identified, is recognizable in the front row on the left.) See also Golub, p. 267 n. 41, for another account of this incident. Field, 1986, p. 129, states that "on the basis of the Evreinov trial it is fair to place Evreinov behind Nabokov as a major Russian influence"; this is because Nabokov defended the protagonist's desire in *The Chief Thing* "to make reality over into a transcendent illusion," which "is a central idea that we can follow in Nabokov from *The Eye* and *Glory* through *Pale Fire* and *Look at the Harlequins!*" However, it is worth stressing that Nabokov's unequivocally positive personages such as Fyodor in *The Gift* (to say nothing of Nabokov himself in *Speak, Memory*) are concerned with perceiving their own unique realities clearly; indeed, it is Nabokov's negative and blind characters who make solipsistic projections onto the world. Evreinov's possible influence on Nabokov is also suggested by "A. A." and by Slonim.
2. Field, 1986, pp. 129, 188; Golub, p. 266 n. 41. Boyd, 1990, pp. 391–92, quotes Nabokov on his admiration for Evreinov's mimicry and his distaste for Evreinov's philosophizing.
3. All references to Evreinov's ideas are drawn from his anthology *The Theatre in Life*, which, as its editor indicates (p. xi), is a compendium of chapters taken or revised from a number of earlier books that had appeared originally in Russian; page references will be given in the text.
4. Evreinov and Nabokov share another parallel in their conceptions of the link between ethics and imagination. In "The Art of Literature and Commonsense," Nabokov speaks of criminals as those who lack the imagination to picture the consequences of their crimes. Similarly, Evreinov discusses Raskolnikov from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* as someone who would not have needed to kill the old pawnbroker if he had been a better "actor for himself" (pp. 120–21).
5. "Pushkin, or the Real and the Plausible," p. 42.

NABOKOV AND FLAUBERT

Nabokov mentions, in *Speak, Memory,* that one day his widowed mother received her husband's copy of *Madame Bovary* bearing the following inscrip-

tion on the flyleaf: "'The unsurpassed pearl of French literature'," which prompts him to make the following comment: "a judgment that still holds true" (174). He writes as if his father were still alive to confirm his earlier judgment, or rather as if he himself identified with his father who had so praised the novel. *Madame Bovary,* which served as a kind of posthumous letter, was obviously a very significant link between father, mother, and son. Flaubert had written other works, but Nabokov never liked, and rarely mentioned them except the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* whose ironic epigraph ("the majority is always right"), the narrator of *The Gift* claims, Chernyshevski would have taken seriously (*Gift* 234). In a letter addressed to Véra in 1932, Nabokov wrote that he was rereading *Madame Bovary* "for the hundredth time."[1] For him, Flaubert—whose name Chernyshevski spelt with an "o," and Van Veen humorously turned into a Germanic name, "Floeberg" (*Gift* 253; *Ada* 128)—was the author of one book, as if he took literally Flaubert's famous statement: "Madame Bovary, c'est moi" ("I am Madame Bovary").

Fellow Craftsmen

Nabokov's lectures on *Madame Bovary* are a tribute to Flaubert as a wonderful craftsman. After labelling *Madame Bovary* as "the most romantic" of all the fairy tales he was lecturing on (*LL* 125), Nabokov declares that he is going to study the form, above all, the "structures (*mouvements* as [Flaubert] termed them), thematic lines, style, poetry, and characters" (*LL* 126). He was a formalist of a kind, though he used none of the methodological instruments recommended by Eikhenbaum or Barthes. As a writer he was acutely aware of the writing problems Flaubert had had to solve to compose his masterpiece.

He begins with a denunciation of Homais's and other characters' philistinism, a term which he equates to "*bourgeois*" in French (*LL* 126). In his *Nikolai Gogol*, he had claimed that Homais, as well as Rodolphe, personified what he called "*poshlust*," a term which, he said in the same book, could be expressed in English by the following words: "'cheap, sham, common, smutty, pink-and-blue, high falutin', in bad taste'" (70, 64). Nabokov mentioned the word "*bourgeois*" again in a letter to Edmund Wilson and explained that, for Flaubert, it had none of the ideological connotations Marx found in it (*NWL* 219–20). Flaubert had a much better word for what Nabokov calls "philistinism," "*la bêtise*," a word that most dictionaries would translate as "stupidity, foolishness." Here is what he wrote in a letter to Bouilhet, the year before the publication of *Madame Bovary*: "I feel against the stupidity ['bêtise'] of my time oceans of hatred which stifle me. Shit rises to my mouth like strangulated hernias. But I want to keep it, freeze it, solidify it; I want to make a paste of it with which I will besmear the nineteenth century as they gild Indian pagodas with cow pat, and, who knows? perhaps it will last?"[2] For Flaubert, who was then plunged into Rabelais, "la bêtise" was high falutin' "shit." The Russian

aristocrat was never so crude, of course, but it is clear that philistinism was essentially the same for him.

The lectures continue with a long study of the "layer" theme introduced in the evocation of Charles's ridiculous cap in the first chapter, a cap which reappears in Krug's hallucination of a school scene at the end of *Bend Sinister* (224). The theme is taken up again in the description of the "tiered cake" at the Bovarys' wedding, that of their house at Tostes, and reappears at the end with the three embedded coffins Charles orders for Emma (*LL* 128–32). This theme is obviously emblematic of Charles's bad taste, of his pathetic but unsuccessful attempts to please and be loved. It is Flaubert's pet formula for portraying Charles in the novel. Nabokov also liked to structure his novels around a theme or an image, like the stick in *Despair,* the moth in *Bend Sinister,* the squirrel in *Pnin,* etc., and he often associated a character with a set of images, the Spanish and Mexican knick-knacks for Charlotte Haze in *Lolita,* for instance.

Nabokov then goes on to examine Flaubert's portrayal of Emma and to assess her on moral grounds before providing a list of the good and bad people in the book: "Who are the 'good' people of the book? Obviously, the villain is Lheureux, but who, besides poor Charles, are the good characters? Somewhat obviously, Emma's father, old Rouault; somewhat unconvincingly, the boy Justin" (*LL* 144). Nabokov takes some precautions, knowing of course that the characters of the novel are not real people and therefore cannot be judged according to our moral principles: "Flaubert's world, as all worlds of major writers, is a world of fancy with its own logic, its own conventions, its own coincidences" (*LL* 146). Flaubert said almost the same thing about the novel in a letter: "There is nothing true about *Madame Bovary.* It is a *totally invented* story."[3] Yet, we cannot help applying to the book the scale of values we use in "real life," though we do not necessarily side with the "good" characters: Charles is "good" but he does not really inspire our sympathy because we consistently view him from outside; we tend to like Emma, though she is "bad," because practically all the story is viewed from her angle. Flaubert claimed that the book was "moral, excessively moral," and could not understand why the censors wanted to suppress it.[4] But, then, he had his own idea about what was moral in art; in a letter to Bonenfant, he wrote: "The morality of Art consists of its very beauty, and I value style above all, and then the True."[5] In other words, he claimed that a novel invented its own values, moral as well as aesthetic.

After this catalogue of good and bad characters, Nabokov begins to study Flaubert's poetic technique, especially his "*counterpoint method* or the method of parallel interlinings and interruptions of two or more conversations or trains of thought" (*LL* 147). This is, we presume, the technique referred to in *Pale Fire* as the "synchronizing device" which, Kinbote says, was "worked to death by Flaubert and Joyce" (196). Nabokov spends a great deal of time analyzing and quoting three long passages: the double dialogue at the inn in Yonville

(Homais and the other men; Emma and Léon), the syncopated dialogue between Emma and Rodolphe at the market fair while the prizes are being awarded, and the cathedral and "cab" scene. The first two scenes were the most difficult passages to compose; about the first one, Flaubert said to Louise Colet: "I never wrote anything more difficult than what I am doing now, trivial dialogue! This very scene at the inn is perhaps going to take me three months, I don't know. I nearly start crying sometimes, feeling so helpless. But I will croak rather than skip it."[6] He spent four months writing the dialogue between Rodolphe and Emma[7] that Nabokov so greatly admired: "This is a wonderful chapter. It has had an enormous influence on James Joyce; and I do not think that, despite superficial innovations, Joyce has gone any further than Flaubert" (*LL* 160).

After examining Emma's downfall as she tries to avoid bankruptcy and to conceal her affair with Léon in Rouen, Nabokov starts analyzing her agony which, he says, "is described in remorseless clinical detail" (*LL* 170). The counterpoint in this scene is provided by the "blind man" with his "clattering stick" who sings his song under her window while she is dying. This scene obviously struck both Joyce and Nabokov. The blind man's stick echoes in Bloom's ears in the "Sirens" chapter of *Ulysses* while Molly is making love with Boylan. The tramp's stick, which plays such a key function in the detective plot of *Despair,* may be another echo of *Madame Bovary*; Hermann is psychologically blind: he stupidly thinks he looks like the man with the stick, and he fails to see that his wife, whose loyalty he depends upon, is having an affair with Ardalion.

Nabokov's notes at the end deal with the imagery of *Madame Bovary* but also with the style, like the semi-colon after "an enumeration of actions or states or objects" followed by "and" which introduces "a culminating image, or a vivid detail" (*LL* 171). He also comments on Flaubert's idiosyncratic use of the French "imparfait." James Joyce criticized Flaubert's use of the simple past (a tense which does not exist in English) in a passage from *Un cœur simple:* "Pendant un demi-siècle, les bourgeoises de Pont l'Evêque envièrent à Mme Aubain sa servante Félicité" ("For half a century, the *bourgeois* of Pont l'Evêque envied Mme Aubain her maid Félicité"). Joyce claimed that he should have written "*enviaient*," but he was wrong, of course, since the emphasis is not on duration or repetition but on the factuality of the thing.[8] The anecdote is interesting because it shows that both Nabokov and Joyce were puzzled by Flaubert's use of the past tenses.

Nabokov completely overlooked the mimetic or autobiographical dimension of the novel. For him, *Madame Bovary* was not a "realistic" novel, and Flaubert had said as much in a letter: "People think I am infuatuated with the real, whereas I loathe it; for it is out of hatred for realism that I undertook this novel."[9] In another letter he wrote: "the subject, the character, the effect, etc., everything is alien to me."[10] He denounced what he called "autolatry" and said how much he envied the poets who can "relieve themselves" simply by writing

a sonnet, whereas the prosewriters "are compelled to hold back everything [. . .] for there is nothing so base in the world as to speak about oneself."[11] The torture of writing about which he constantly complained in his letters came largely from his insistence on fooling the self: "In order to hold the pen with a gallant arm, one must burn a whole side of one's heart."[12] Nabokov and Joyce never experienced such a torture, perhaps because they had learnt from him how to fool the self.

A Haunting Presence

Nabokov was not interested only in the style of the novel, however, but also, and perhaps above all, in Flaubert's "little woman" (his "petite femme" as he used to call her, that is, either his "little woman" or his "little wife") who reappears constantly in his novels. The main replica of Emma Bovary is Martha Dreyer in *King, Queen, Knave.* This novel is a parodic version of Flaubert's masterpiece and a strange prefiguration of Nabokov's most famous novel, *Lolita.* In the foreword to the English translation, Nabokov wrote: "my amiable little imitations of *Madame Bovary,* which good readers will not fail to distinguish, represent a deliberate tribute to Flaubert" (*KQK* x). A tribute, not a pastiche or an imitation, of course. Nabokov reshuffled the characters and the plot of Flaubert's novel, Charles's part being taken by Dreyer, a composite character who represents both Homais and Lheureux and who brings into his house his nephew Franz, a pale replica of Léon. Dreyer, who is nearly drowned by the lovers, survives and prospers at the end, though he was totally blind to their idyll, like Charles. Like Homais, he reaps the benefits of the tragedy. In his commentary on *Eugene Onegin,* Nabokov claimed that "*Madame Bovary* is finished not only because Emma has killed herself but because Homais has at last got his decoration" (vol. III, p. 311). Dreyer is happy and wealthy; he even consoles his rival at the end.

Emma Bovary's charms and sensitiveness are much greater than Martha's, of course. Here is what Nabokov wrote about her in his lectures: "Emma Bovary is intelligent, sensitive, comparatively well educated, but she has a shallow mind: her charm, beauty, and refinement do not preclude a fatal streak of philistinism in her" (*LL* 132–33). Martha, too, is a philistine, but she does not possess any of Emma's qualities. Nabokov wanted to make sure that his readers would see the difference: in the English translation, he added a few lines about Martha's "harlotry" which he prefaced with the following sentence: "She was no Emma, and no Anna" (101).[13] Martha does not experience the passionate feelings nor the dramatic frustration of Emma (or Anna Karenina). She only performs the pitiful gestures of her model in adultery: she is cruel to her dog Tom as Emma was cruel to her daughter; she tells her husband she is taking exercise classes with a Mme l'Empereur to cover up the fact that she is calling on Franz, just as Emma claimed to be taking piano lessons with Mademoiselle Lempereur when in fact she was visiting Léon in Rouen.[14]

Lolita will start to take piano lessons "with a Miss Emperor (as we French scholars may conveniently call her)," but she will skip a few to meet Quilty until "Miss Emperor" calls Humbert (*Lo* 202).

The most significant object which links Martha to Emma is probably a pair of slippers. When Franz first saw Martha on the train, he noticed her "red backless slipper [which] slowly slid off her foot" (*KQK* 14). This is what apparently prompted him to offer her a pair of slippers when she started coming to his room; they kept them "in the lower drawer of the corner chest, for life not unfrequently imitates the French novelists" (102). She puts on these "emblematic slippers" (220) as soon as she arrives at Franz's room; when Dreyer tries to break into the room, she puts her shoulder to the door, slips and loses a slipper, "which had happened already in another life" (221). The model for all these scenes is of course the passage in *Madame Bovary* where Flaubert evokes the cosy assignations in Léon's room: "When she sat on his lap, her leg, which was then too short, hung in the air, and the dainty shoe having no back, was held on only by the toes of her bare foot" (p. 191). The slippers will haunt Martha in her delirium: "'Darling, where did you put my emerald slippers—no, I mean earrings?'" (271). Emma's slippers were "rose-colored," by the way (*Madame Bovary*, p. 191).

The slippers, which reappear in other novels, are often related to what could be called the "Cinderella complex." At the end of the masturbation scene on the couch in *Lolita,* the nymphet gets up to answer the phone, and Humbert notes that "she kept tapping the edge of the table with the slipper she held in her hand" (61). In *Ada*, the French maid, Blanche, sometimes called "Ashette," loses a slipper which Ada picks up and throws into a waste-paper basket during her first love scene with Van (116). Van claims that Lucette, before she died, "saw a pair of new vair-furred bedroom slippers, which Brigitte had forgotten to pack" (494). These are not glass slippers, as the legend has it; in *Pnin*, the protagonist explains that "Cendrillon's shoes were not made of glass but of Russian squirrel fur—*vair,* in French" (158). For Nabokov, Emma Bovary was a kind of tragic Cinderella.

The slippers are emblematic of Emma's intense and yet vulgar eroticism. In a letter to Wilson, Nabokov confessed: "Neither am I attracted by Marion Bloom's 'smellow melons' or Albertine's '*bonnes grosses joues*' [nice fat cheeks]; but I gladly follow Rodolphe ('*Avançons! Du courage!*' [Forward! Take heart!]) as he leads Emma to her golden doom in the bracken" (*NWL* 167). In his lectures, he insisted on "her extraordinary physical charm, her unusual grace, her birdlike, hummingbirdlike vivacity" which are "irresistibly attractive and enchanting to three men in the book" (*LL* 133). At the same time, he stigmatized her falsity: "She is false, she is deceitful by nature: she deceives Charles from the very start before actually committing adultery. She lives among philistines, and she is a philistine herself" (*LL* 142). Flaubert said as much about her in his letters: "her nature is somewhat perverse, she is a falsely poetic woman with false sentiments."[15]

Many of Nabokov's women, besides Martha, share Emma's ambiguous charms. Margot in *Laughter in the Dark* is crude and vulgar but terribly exciting: "she walked up and down the room in her red silk wrapper, her right hand at her left armpit, and puffed hard at a cigarette. With her dark hair falling over her brow she looked like a gypsy" (90–1). In *Lolita,* Humbert insists on "the fey grace, the elusive, shifty, soul-shattering, insidious charm" of the archetypal nymphet, but he also concedes that these characteristics are not necessarily impaired by "vulgarity, or at least what a given community terms so" (17). Lolita is in many ways an American teenage version of Emma Bovary.

The year-long trip Humbert takes with her around the United States looks like a development of the "cab" scene in *Madame Bovary.* This scene was held as one of the most pornographic by the Imperial Prosecutor during the trial of *Madame Bovary.* In *Lolita,* the evocation of the trip begins with an allusion to Flaubert: "We came to know—*nous connûmes,* to use a Flaubertian intonation—the stone cottages under enormous Chateaubriandesque trees, the brick unit, the adobe unit" (145). This long list of motels is reminiscent of the list of streets along which the "cab" drove. Emma and Léon were parading their illegitimate passion under the eyes of the dazzled "bourgeois" (*Madame Bovary,* p. 177). The torn letter thrown through the "yellow curtains" by a "bare hand" was the emblem of that love, a little like Hester Pryn's embroidered letter in Hawthorne's novel. Emma had decided to end her affair with Léon and had written him a letter to that effect, but the letter was never posted because she finally surrendered to his caresses.

There are many other echoes of *Madame Bovary* and references to Flaubert in *Lolita,* like the scene where Humbert runs around Beardsley thinking he has lost Lolita, like the fancy name Humbert gives to their pursuer ("Gustave Trapp"), or the direct allusion to Emma's death: "Never will Emma rally, revived by the sympathetic salts in Flaubert's father's timely tear" (p. 265). But it is the ambiguity of Lolita, both erotically exciting and essentially vulgar, which constitutes the main link between the two novels. Flaubert considered Emma to be perverse, yet he loved her, narcissistically as it were. Nabokov never said: "Lolita, *c'est moi,*" but considering the many references he made to his nymphet in his following novels and in his interviews, it is clear that, in his imagination, he entertained the same kind of relation with her as Flaubert did with Emma Bovary. The "little women" were, in a way, their personal myths.

Conclusion

Nabokov did not like to be compared with other writers, Conrad and Kafka especially, and he rejected the very concept of influence, with regard to himself at least. Though he liked Joyce immensely, he told an interviewer that he had learnt nothing from him (*SO* 71). He did not say that about Flaubert, however; in his lectures, he claimed that "[w]ithout Flaubert there would have been no Marcel Proust in France, no James Joyce in Ireland. Chekhov in Russia would

not have been quite Chekhov" (*LL* 147). No Nabokov either, we presume, but he was probably too timid, in those pre-*Lolita* and pre-*Ada* days, to claim a seat for himself on that Olympus. Flaubert obviously had a strong influence on him. René Micha, in his introduction to the *Arc* issue on Nabokov, refused to believe that Nabokov, whom he lumped with the French Nouveau Roman, had much in common with Flaubert.[16] In the structuralist period, one was often tempted to consider Nabokov as a metafictional writer, but it is clear now that he belongs to a much older tradition of great fiction-writers, going all the way back to Cervantes and Sterne, who always tried to make their style, their diction, their language games functional, and who, like Flaubert, strove "to make people dream."[17]

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Notes

1. Quoted by Boyd, 1990, p. 378.
2. *Correspondance,* 4e série, p. 96. My translation, as in all the other passages from "3e série" and "4e série" of Flaubert's *Correspondance.*
3. *Correspondance,* 4e série, lettre à Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie, p. 164.
4. *Correspondance,* 4e série, lettre à Maurice Schlésinger, p. 147.
5. *Correspondance,* 4e série, p. 136.
6. *Correspondance,* 3e série, lettre à Louise Colet, p. 24.
7. *Correspondance,* 3e série, lettre à Louise Colet, p. 376.
8. The anecdote is reported by Ellman, p. 506.
9. *Correspondance,* 4e série, lettre à Mme Roger des Genelles, p. 134.
10. *Correspondance,* 3e série, lettre à Louise Colet, p. 3.
11. Ibid., lettre à Louise Colet, p. 95.
12. *Correspondance,* 3e série, lettre à Louise Colet, p. 215.
13. Grayson compared the two versions of the novel in *Nabokov Translated,* pp. 91–2.
14. *Madame Bovary,* p. 195. Henceforth, all page references to the novel will be given in the text.
15. *Correspondance,* 4e série, Lettre à Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie, p. 57.
16. "Introduction," *L'Arc,* p. 4.
17. *Correspondance,* 3e série, lettre à Louise Colet, p. 322.

NABOKOV AND FREUD

"All my books should be stamped Freudians, Keep Out," wrote Nabokov in 1963 (*BS* xviii), and his fiction, as well as his letters, interviews, and essays, bears witness to this sustained struggle against the "Viennese Quack." From an early glimpse in *Bend Sinister* of "Dr. S. Freud's face and signature" floating at the bottom of the toilet bowl (85) to the baroque refractions of that same

image in *Ada*, Freud's presence has haunted the Nabokovian text—which misses no opportunity to declare its absence.

Many critics have dismissed this lifelong polemic as yet another hobby-horse, the favorite foible of a notoriously opinionated author. Yet, despite Nabokov's denials, the stakes seem much higher; in the persistent competition between his discourse and Freud's, certain central problematics of the twentieth-century novel are being (as the Quack might say) obsessively enacted. Harold Bloom has suggested that "Rejecting Freud is not a possible option in our time,"[1] since the writer inhabits a culture not only permeated but to a large extent constituted by psychoanalytic discourse. Thus the novelist can no longer be non-Freudian, only anti-Freudian—which very position invites psychoanalytic scrutiny. Frustrated by the totalitarianism of psychoanalysis, Nabokov rejects it both as a theory of the human subject and as a hermeneutic system. In his work and the performance of his public persona, he strikes back with preemptive strategies to protect the privacy and mystery of the psyche and the illusionary integrity of the text. But the more he does so, the more he demonstrates the reach of psychoanalytic discourse and the constraints it places on the novelist, endlessly compelled to negotiate it.

Nabokov's antipathy to psychoanalysis scarcely requires documentation: apart from the elaborate parodies in his fiction, statements like the following pepper his prose: "Freudism and all it has tainted with its grotesque implications and methods appears to me to be one of the vilest deceits practiced by people on themselves and on others. I reject it utterly, along with a few other medieval items still adored by the ignorant, the conventional, or the very sick" (*SO* 23–24). All Nabokov's formidable stylistic resources are requisitioned for this battle, as he derides, for example, the "expensive confession fests" of psychoanalysis (*Ada* 364) or mocks "the credulous and the vulgar," who "continue to believe that all mental woes can be cured by a daily application of old Greek myths to their private parts" (*SO* 66).

One of Nabokov's tenets is that "A creative writer must study carefully the works of his rivals"—including, of course, "the Almighty" (*SO* 32)—and this rule has not been neglected in Freud's case. According to his first biographer, Andrew Field, "Nabokov . . . is well acquainted with Freud's work (in English translations) and his quarrel with Freudianism actually dates back nearly forty years."[2] From an early parody in an émigré journal to a 1967 letter hailing the appearance of Freud's "Woodrow Wilson"—"not only because of its comic appeal, which is great, but because that surely must be the last rusty nail in the Viennese Quack's coffin" (*SO* 215)—Nabokov's attacks show how diligently he has scavenged Freud. When an interviewer asked whether his "barbed comments" betrayed a "contempt based upon familiarity," Nabokov stipulated: "Bookish familiarity only. The ordeal itself is much too silly and disgusting to be contemplated even as a joke" (*SO* 23).

Nabokov's assaults on Freud usually take the form of a critique of symbolism, that "lewd, ludicrous and vulgar mistake of the Signy-Mondieu

analysts" (*Ada* 363). "I detest symbols and allegories," he avows (*Lo* 314), claiming that his books are "mythproof," impermeable to any hermeneutics: "Freudians flutter around them avidly . . . stop, sniff, and recoil" (*Eye*, Foreword [iii]). For Nabokov, the text, like the dream or the individual mind, is a self-sufficient artifact in which "nothing—underscore 'nothing' . . . can be construed as allowing itself to be deciphered by a witch doctor" (*Ada* 364).

But more is at stake for Nabokov than a repudiation of symbolism. There is also a political and ideological dimension to his critique, implied by his allusion to "the police state of sexual myth" (*SM* 300) and underscored by the appearance in *Ada* of a sinister "Dr. Sig Heiler," the khaki-clad director of a "psykitsch" asylum. Somewhat revealingly for a writer who claims supreme indifference to "general ideas," "the Future of Mankind, and so on" (*BS* xii), Nabokov insists on the "dangerous ethical consequences" of psychoanalysis, since, in his view, it absolves the individual of responsibility for his actions (*SO* 116). *Bend Sinister* explores these ethical and political issues in grotesque detail, imagining a totalitarian state based on warped Freudianism, an idea to which Nabokov often returns: "what a great mistake on the part of dictators to ignore psychoanalysis—a whole generation might be so easily corrupted that way!" (*SM* 300–301).

Yet Nabokov evidently believes that a whole generation has indeed been "corrupted that way," otherwise the battle would not be worth fighting. Nabokov pursues Freud not as an absurd nonentity but as an evil Doppelgänger who haunts his every text and who must be destroyed again and again to ensure its survival. Like his protagonist in "Tyrants Destroyed," Nabokov becomes obsessed with a presence so powerful that it penetrates "everywhere, infecting . . . the way of thinking and the everyday life of every person."[3] Eliminating this dictator becomes the narrator's *idée fixe*, as he wonders "How can I get rid of him? I cannot stand it any longer. Everything is full of him, everything I love has been besmirched, everything has become his likeness, his mirror image . . ." (32). At length, it dawns on him that his mission has already been accomplished: "Rereading my chronicle, I see that, in my efforts to make him terrifying, I have only made him ridiculous, thereby destroying him—an old, proven method" (36). Nabokov evidently believes that he has engaged such a strategy against Freud—but has his endless scorn served to dominate and displace psychoanalytic discourse, or has it, on the contrary, only confirmed Freud's omnipresence?

Nabokov's constant invocation of Freud has struck many critics as itself "obsessive," and certainly to proclaim an absence so often and so insistently is to evoke a presence: the Quack himself would have deemed it symptomatic. Yet, however tempting Freud's followers might find it to "analyze" this resistance—and some have found it irresistible (see Berman, Elms, Hiatt, Hyde, Schneiderman, Suagee, Welsen)—to do so would be a tactical error. Not only would it be the response—automatic, "vulgar"—that the text has already anticipated, but it would be, quite simply, to miss the point.

As Appel has pointed out, a great deal has been written about "unreliable narrators" in Nabokov's work, but too little about "unreliable readers." Nabokov's texts, he warns, are constructed with such readers' "predictable responses in mind" (*AnL* lvii), a strategy that the author himself often flaunts. In the Foreword to *King, Queen, Knave*, Nabokov emphasizes that "the Viennese delegation has not been invited," adding this warning: "If, however, a resolute Freudian manages to slip in, he or she should be warned that a number of cruel traps have been set here and there in the novel" (x).

Not all critics have successfully negotiated these traps. Though most major Nabokov scholars (Field, Appel, Boyd, Alexandrov) have accepted Nabokov's critique of Freud at face value, and have to some extent endorsed it, others have refused to play the game on Nabokov's terms—with mixed results. In his book, *Freud and Nabokov*, Geoffrey Green offers a subtle analysis of both "Freud" and "Nabokov" as constructs, quasi-fictional characters created by Nabokov for public deployment. Overall, however, Green's method consists in juxtaposing statements by Nabokov with statements by Freud to reveal Nabokov as a Freudian in spite of himself. The exercise is largely unconvincing, not because Green fails to establish a symmetry between Nabokov's words and Freud's, but because that very symmetry is the problem—for both novelist and critic—not its solution.

For what, finally, is the real burden of Nabokov's antipathy to psychoanalysis? Nabokov rejects psychoanalysis as he does all totalitarianisms of meaning, all systems that claim to have captured and colonized truth. Through their crude impositions, such systems perpetually threaten the delicate, intricate, multicolored tissue of individual experience, which is, for Nabokov, the only "truth" that counts. Not just any experience, or even anybody's—Nabokov is an aristocrat of the imagination—but experience fully realized, "in the rare full sense of the word," and recreated through memory infused with desire, that "third sight" which is "individual, magically detailed imagination" (*Ada* 251–52).

Ironically, however (as Nabokov is acutely aware), this very realm—the realm of imagination, of memory and desire—is precisely that of psychoanalytic discourse; the chosen domain of Nabokov's fiction overlaps, enormously, a region already colonized by Vienna. Memory is Freud's masterplot; his too the ruling discourse of desire. Thus the ideal of individual imagination turns out to be most immediately and most intimately threatened by psychoanalysis, which represents, in Mouchard's words, "the closest theory and the most incompatible."[4] "The closest," because it has already appropriated those realms, but "the most incompatible," because it has preempted their poetry, publishing instead a cheap phrasebook, a cut-rate guide to the terrain of the individual psyche.

The struggle, then, is territorial: for Nabokov, it is a battle to reclaim what has been lost to a discourse deadening in its priority. Nabokov's lifelong polemic against Freud has had the paradoxical effect of introducing him into

his every text—but this is because, for the novelist, he is already there. Those delicate structures of desire that the writer wills into being and weaves into fiction have already been manhandled; the fingerprints are all over them of "an Austrian crank with a shabby umbrella" (*SO* 116). They are, in a sense, his artifacts—and this is why Nabokov considers Freud a worthy rival. The power of Freud's discourse to constitute its objects, to create a Foucauldian universe of "knowledge/power," compels the novelist's grudging respect, his recognition of psychoanalysis as almost a rival novelistic practice. The Freudian text, which appropriates the writerly resources of fiction, mythology, and biography, differs from other novelistic practices mainly in the institutional ground from which it speaks, while fiction remains, in de Certeau's words, "the text which nothing authorizes."[5]

Freud's text thus compels both recognition and resistance because of its power, priority, and proximity. Yet another factor complicates what might otherwise be a classic "anxiety of influence" situation, and that is the persistence of psychoanalytic discourse as a system of hermeneutics applied not only to human behavior but to literary texts. Not only does Freud's text threaten to displace the novelist's before the fact as a theory of human subjectivity, but it also threatens to displace it afterwards as a theory of literary production and reception.

Nabokov's protracted polemic against psychoanalysis thus represents, in part, the fictional text's struggle against an encroaching hermeneutics—a struggle that is precisely the subject of *Pale Fire*. *Pale Fire* presents two texts in deadly competition, a power struggle in which each seeks to assert its priority and to absorb the other into itself. As "text" to which all else is "commentary," Shade's poem appears to have an unarguable priority; Kinbote, however, claims for himself and his text an originary power without which Shade's could neither mean nor be. Shade's poem, he claims, is "their joint composition," engendered in Shade by Kinbote's tale, "the book in me whose pages he was to cut" (296). Thus the commentator's task becomes no more—and no less—than that of tracing in the poem those "echoes and wavelets of fire, and pale phosphorescent hints, and all the many subliminal debts to me" (297). Moreover, not only has the so-called commentator somehow brought the book into being; without him, it would remain forever unintelligible: "Let me state that without my notes Shade's text simply has no human reality at all since the human reality of a poem such as his . . . has to depend entirely on the reality of its author and his surroundings, attachments, and so forth, a reality that only my notes can provide" (28–29). Kinbote freely admits that his "dear poet would probably not have subscribed" to this view but asserts what he takes to be his unanswerable power: "for better or worse, it is the commentator who has the last word" (29).

This nightmare—the nightmare of not having the last word—haunts all of Nabokov's works, and *Pale Fire* is only its most overt realization. In Nabokov's other texts, the battle for the last word takes the form of parody,

polemic, and preemptive strikes; in *Pale Fire*, the power struggle itself emerges as subject. One of the possible resolutions projected in *Pale Fire* is the destruction of the poet (Shade), while the rival poet–commentator succeeds in promoting himself from "chance witness" to "protagonist" (299), exulting in his illicit invulnerability: "Thus with cautious steps, among deceived enemies, I circulated, plated with poetry, armored with rhymes, stout with another man's song . . . bullet-proof at long last" (300).

Yet this resolution represents only one of multiple possibilities. The passage in *Timon of Athens* from which the novel draws its title suggests a kind of circular indebtedness and mutual absorption, with the question of origin ultimately undecidable. Similarly, the relation between "Pale Fire" and Kinbote's Commentary is less that of parasite and host than of two rival and equipotent fictions, each seeking to "resolve" the other into itself. Shade and Kinbote are explicitly conceived as rival poets, with Shade defending the latter against the label of lunatic: "That is the wrong word . . . One should not apply it to a person who deliberately peels off a drab and unhappy past and replaces it with a brilliant invention. That's merely turning a new leaf with the left hand" (238). Kinbote is thus seen as a rival fictionist, a fabulist whose discourse has the power to constitute a universe in competition with that of "Pale Fire."

Likewise, in *Lolita* Nabokov posits a direct competition between his own discourse and that of psychoanalysis. In his Foreword, "John Ray, Jr.," claims that if Humbert, "our demented diarist," had gone, in the "fatal summer of 1947, to a competent psychopathologist, there would have been no disaster; but then, neither would there have been this book" (*Lo* 5). Although little that John Ray, Jr., says can be taken at face value, Nabokov's juxtaposition of the two discourses here implies that they are mutually exclusive, the one always threatening to usurp the other. To protect the fictional text in its ideal integrity—in a play so prolific that no other discourse will ever be able to insert itself—Nabokov has to engage a number of preemptive strategies in *Lolita*, guerrilla raids into Freud's realm to mine the ground. Almost every possible psychoanalytic interpretation of Humbert's predicament has been anticipated, planted in the text, and wired to explode at the first Viennese advance.

Thus the first problem to confront a psychoanalytic reading of *Lolita* is not the absence of recognizable analytic configurations but the fact that such configurations are in no sense "latent": they constitute a system of signifiers in their own right rather than any ultimate signified of the text. The psychoanalytic symbol-hunter who responds trustingly to the clues planted by Nabokov will not only be preempted time and again but will also have the unpleasant experience of running into that uniquely Nabokovian dead end: "the mirror you break your nose against" (*Lo* 225).

Humbert's history, for instance, is constructed in accordance with orthodox Freudian theory on the nature and origin of "perversions": here is the prototypical sexual trauma (Annabel Lee, *coitus* rudely *interruptus*) complete with castrating father-figure, "the old man of the sea" (13); here, too, is a

knowing nod in the direction of an earlier experience of loss and separation (the death of Humbert's mother in a "freak accident" when he was three). Then come all the requisite hints of Humbert's impotence and flight from "large-as-life" women—but the reader who naively seizes upon, say, the dream in which "one bullet after another feebly drops on the floor from the sheepish muzzle" of Humbert's gun (47) or upon his penchant for girls with hips "no bigger than those of a squatting lad" (22), is destined to break a nose right here: "I discovered there was an endless source of robust enjoyment in trifling with psychiatrists: cunningly leading them on; never letting them see that you know all the tricks of the trade; inventing for them elaborate dreams, pure classics in style . . . teasing them with fake 'primal scenes'; and never allowing them the slightest glimpse of one's real sexual predicament. By bribing a nurse I won access to some files and discovered, with glee, cards calling me 'potentially homosexual' and 'totally impotent'" (34). Similarly, the "latent" Oedipal implications of Humbert's love-triangle with Lo and Charlotte are unraveled as Humbert himself calls it a "parody of incest" (287), and the reader armed with the "standardized symbols of the psychoanalytic racket" (285) is likely to be left behind, earnestly analyzing a practical joke. As Stuart suggests, "A psychological interpretation of a situation that is itself a parody can be done, of course, but it seems at best foolish."[6]

Nabokov has referred to himself, without irony, as a "psychological novelist," and in an interview went so far as to assert that "All novelists of any worth are psychological novelists" because the peculiar genius of fiction "belongs of course to psychology—psychology at its best."[7] This poses the critical problem of trying to determine what Nabokov means by "psychology." Unlike Freud, Nabokov considers consciousness, rather than unconsciousness, psychology's proper realm. Unconsciousness for Nabokov is a kind of death; consciousness is "the only real thing in the world and the greatest mystery of all" (*BS* 188). And in Nabokov's psychology, the subject, like the text, has no "inside" or "underneath": everything, as Appel suggests, "is *there*, in sight (no symbols lurking in murky depths)" (*AnL* xx), but its perception presents a problem in reading, in penetrating the cryptic coloration.

Once penetrated, however, a given consciousness may reveal no more than the few tired cliches whereby this particular self constitutes itself (as in the case of *Despair*'s Hermann or *Lolita*'s Charlotte); beyond that, according to Nabokov, there may well be nothing. For Nabokov, the power of popular discourses like the Freudian is such that they invade selves as well as texts—and metastasize. In such cases, the terms of psychoanalytic discourse may be the appropriate ones to invoke, not because they fathom some ultimate psychological secret, but because they most accurately render the vulgar limits of a particular consciousness or self-consciousness.

The problem becomes more complex when Nabokov wishes to evoke more intricate modes of mental being, states of desire purer and more poignant. Such exquisite states—the pangs of exile, loss, and longing; desire

too ecstatic to endure; "aesthetic bliss" and death's "black nausea"—lead the novelist, inevitably, to realms where a Quack has already set up shop. No matter what strategies are employed to evict him, and then to exorcize his obstinate ghost, his discourse still threatens to prevail. How, then, can Nabokov write about desire in a way that will be neither poisoned by parody nor subject to Freudian fiat?

The entire "Annabel Lee" episode in *Lolita* provides a telling example. Here, the whole idea of "the 'gratification' of a lifetime urge, and release from the 'subconscious' obsession of an incomplete childhood romance . . . the search for a Kingdom by the Sea, a Sublimated Riviera, or whatnot" (166–67) is presented as pure parody; at the same time, if Humbert's narration is to have any sway at all, this very incident must serve as genuine currency in the economy of his pain. Nabokov's strategy here is highly disingenuous. On the one hand, psychoanalytic economies of desire are invoked only to be denied, named only to be negated, but on the other hand they remain essential to the disposition of the text. The psychoanalytic structure is inscribed and then effaced by parody, yet it remains intact, in place, and wholly legible.

Such, on a larger scale, is Nabokov's relation to the repudiated Freudian text. The "Freudian" or "symbolic" signifier, though subjected to the ritual of derision, is permitted to survive, this tension between denial and affirmation empowering the author as it preempts the reader. So complex a strategy obviously challenges any restricted notion of parody, and yet all parody, no matter how sophisticated, involves a paradox. However much it may foreground the arbitrariness of the text and its formal pretexts, however much it may proclaim the pure play of language, however much it may seal the text into self-reflexivity, parody is the mode that, above all others, evokes a *hors-texte*. By definition, parody appeals to something other than itself; in Nabokov's parodies of Freud, the precepts and practices of psychoanalytic discourse are engaged, as ideology, on the formal level.

Thus Nabokov's claims to a pure textuality, a discourse somehow impervious to vulgar constraints such as "history" or "ideas," can be taken no more seriously than his claim to have banished Freud. Indeed, the very methods employed to assert the text's independence are those that undermine it; parody and polemic point insistently to the *hors-texte* they are designed to deny. Far from articulating an absolute freedom, they inscribe instead the horizons of a particular historical moment and the limits of authorial power.

Nabokov's whole *oeuvre* can be seen as a highly self-conscious response to this predicament, a recognition (despite his denials) of the writer's historical situation as a limiting horizon, shutting off certain formal and epistemological possibilities while opening determinate new ones—which, whether accepted or rejected, must nevertheless be engaged. For the twentieth-century novel, this problem becomes particularly acute as the genre, in Frosch's words, "confronts with alternating enthusiasm and anxiety the freight of analytic, theoretical and historical awareness that it has not yet converted into its own

kind of energy, and which threatens it with obsolescence."[8] While this constraint may weigh the novelist down, it may also lend him wings—or at least a funambulist's pole, as Nabokov suggests in *The Gift,* showing how, "on the very brink of parody," the writer must find his way along a "narrow ridge" between his "own truth and a caricature of it" (200).

Jenefer Shute

Notes

1. Bloom, *Vladimir Nabokov,* p. 3.
2. Field, 1967, pp. 262–63.
3. *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories,* p. 9; subsequent page references will be given in the text.
4. Mouchard, p. 315.
5. De Certeau, p. 135.
6. Stuart, p. 120.
7. Interview with Appel, 1971, p. 216.
8. Frosch, 1973, p. 387.

NABOKOV AND GOGOL

Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852) was, together with Pushkin, the founder of modern Russian prose, and in the area of style he was the larger figure, because where Pushkin condensed and purified, Gogol expanded and enriched its expressive possibilities. In the management of words, Pushkin's poetic impulses went exclusively into his verse; Gogol's poetic impulses, for lack of alternatives, produced a yeastily complex prose of astonishing originality, able to accommodate the entire range of Russian style, from the lofty to the local and colloquial, often in the same work and sometimes in a single sentence. He was credited in his lifetime (and for a long time after) with having introduced "realism"—all the elements of the everyday and the apparently insignificant—into Russian literature, and his comic genius was deemed to be narrowly satiric. Only at the dawning of the twentieth century did a few critics perceive the distortion beneath such labels and seek to confront the baffling and elusive essence of his writing. "We still do not know what Gogol is," one of them insisted in 1909.[1] His greatness had been felt early in Russia and never subsequently questioned, but its nature remained an enigma.

If only because of his position at the head of the modern prose tradition (less than a century old at the time Nabokov began writing), Gogol would offer a legitimate, if not inevitable, term of comparison for any of the writers who came after him: they were, inescapably, his heirs. They might, as the majority

did in the nineteenth century, react against his manner and style, using his achievement as a trampoline for their own very different explorations. Or they might, as Nabokov's post-Symbolist generation did, take Gogol's strange created world as warrant for creating their own. Rejection or acceptance, explicit or implicit, were of course neither simple nor mutually exclusive. The fact remains, as Nabokov himself put it, that "every Russian writer owes something to Gogol" (*SO* 151).

One major writer's debt to another is always for help rendered in seeing or solving particular artistic problems, in facilitating his or her self-creation. Only in this sense of a literal "flowing-in," as a contribution to radical individuality, is "influence" worth noting. That at least is its strong sense, its weak counterpart being imitation. Hence Nabokov's repeated insistence that he had "never been influenced by anyone in particular, dead or quick" (*SO* 116).

Nonetheless, many critics have observed the affinities between Nabokov's writings and Gogol's—in form, style, and purport. Both show a tendency to non-endings in terms of plot, favoring circular forms that enclose what amounts to an "autonomous and self-justifying world."[2] Both feature freakish and/or morally repugnant characters, often bearing odd names, oftener still inclined to solipsism, vividly but somehow incompletely "alive," many of them surrogate artists. Both writers conflate prose and poetry—Nabokov declared his personal inability to see "any generic difference between poetry and artistic prose" (*SO* 44)—and both exalt art over everyday life as a rival reality which "scorns to be other than itself, and scorns to be joined on to the general procession of human experience."[3] Both are subtle artificers, whose stylistic virtuosity seems to proclaim its own self-sufficiency, its liability to deceive, its links to dream and other territories of the irrational. As a result, both writers have appeared "cold," supercilious, perverse, and inhumane to readers in search of vicariously reassuring pictures of the familiar world.[4]

Most of the literature linking Gogol and Nabokov follows these general lines. It is, to use Nabokov's word, "classificational." An alternative approach has been concretely intertextual, the pinpointing of allusions—direct and indirect, probable or dubious—to specific Gogolian characters or situations or devices in the works of Nabokov. This is a rich field but a lesser activity in which the allusion-hunter may, at best, catch one sovereign artist in the act of saluting another.[5]

Sovereignty, of course, is the point behind Nabokov's gleeful declaration that "desperate Russian critics, trying hard to find an Influence and to pigeonhole my own novels, have once or twice linked me up with Gogol, but when they looked again I had untied the knots and the box was empty" (*NG* 155). The point is that Gogol at his best—like any writer of genius—"is incomparable and inimitable" (*SO* 103). That is what Nabokov set out to show when he published his brilliant and onesided *Nikolai Gogol* in 1944.

The book is far from being "the innocent, and rather superficial, little sketch of his life" that Nabokov later termed it (and that seemed suggested by

the abandonment of his original title, "Gogol Through the Looking Glass").[6] That original title would have braced us better for what is to come; but "Nikolai Gogol" makes a slyer point—that, as Nabokov later wrote of himself, "the best part of a writer's biography is not the record of his adventures but the story of his style" (*SO* 154–55). It is this conviction that justifies beginning with Gogol's death and ending with his birth, as if to say that between these two brackets of the artist's life, the sequential flow is unimportant. And in fact, the book is not concerned to give a sense of what it was like to *be* Gogol, but rather what it is like to *see* Gogol—as a character ("the oddest man in Russia") and, ultimately, as the label for an evolving literary style.

Nabokov's later casual and disingenuous reference to his "rather frivolous little book"[7] matches the signs in the text of playfulness and critical irresponsibility—important works undiscussed; a purported conversation with the publisher about these and other omissions; whimsical and ambiguous transliteration; and the "nightmare index" (removed only in the 1973 edition). I will return to the extremer features of this performance; for now, I would merely stress that Nabokov's simplification of Gogol is itself a highly complex and fluid thing, its mannered writing—for all its fluctuations between the poles of critical introduction and personal artistic credo—lending it an esthetic value quite irrespective of the relative adequacy, justice, or even truth of the propositions it contains.

The book (the first in English to be devoted to its subject) had been solicited as part of a series called Makers of Modern Literature. The publisher's purpose—and, in part, Nabokov's—was to introduce a strange and poorly understood writer to the English-speaking public; in fact, the public got more than its money's worth, for it introduced two, now offering views of Gogol of dazzling clarity, now a double view of author and subject, at still other times revealing only the author himself—as a quasi-fictional personage, "the 'Nabokov' he . . . created to write this book for him."[8]

The "real" Nabokov had, as a student, run afoul of the reductionist categories that clustered around Gogol in Russian criticism and Russian schools. At 18, he recalled, he had received a grade of 2 ("Highly Unsatisfactory") for an essay on *Dead Souls* which failed to engage in the expected "social and moral bookkeeping," identifying "types" and showing whether they were "positive" or "negative."[9] The English-language accounts of Gogol that existed before Nabokov's were (with one exception) crude restatements of such traditionally crude Russian views, peppered with factual errors and enormities of misprision. Isabel Hapgood (whom Nabokov derides as a translator and calls "Hepgood") claimed in a 1902 volume surveying Russian literature to be relying exclusively on the views of Russian critics. Accordingly, Gogol is identified as "the father of modern Russian realism," the discoverer not only of the "types" that allegedly populate his fictions but "almost literally" of "*all the types which we encounter in the works of the great novelists who followed him, . . . at least so far as the male characters are concerned*"![10] *The Inspector General*

is "not a caricature, but . . . a faithful society portrait and satire."[11] Plots are garbled in her account as appallingly as is Gogol's biography, and stages of Gogol's rapid development are denied: his three cycles of stories, early and late, are alleged to contain "essentially the same ingredients, so that they may be considered as a whole."[12] The cruel mockery in "The Overcoat" is called "kindly wit." The "types" in *Dead Souls*, published at the end of 1842, are pronounced "as vivid, as faithful, for those who know the Russia of today, as when they were first introduced to an enthusiastic Russian public in 1847."[13] The final effect is to deny Gogol any created world at all.

After Hapgood came Maurice Baring with his *Landmarks in Russian Literature* (1910) and its chapter on "Gogol and the Cheerfulness of the Russian People." Baring, too, gets dates and names wrong. The characters of "The Overcoat" are, once again, alleged to be "handled by their creator with a kindly sympathy, and never with cruelty or disdain," and "a vast amount of good-nature and of humanity" is attributed to the unrelievedly "amusing" characters of *Dead Souls*! In Gogol's pathos "there is neither bitterness nor gloom; *there is no shadow of the powers of darkness*[!], *no breath of the icy terror which blows through the works of Tolstoy*[!!]; *there is no hint of the emptiness and the void, or of a fear of them*[!!!]."[14]

Seventeen years after Baring—and seventeen before Nabokov—Prince D. S. Mirsky published the first volume of his *History of Russian Literature*, whose chapter on Gogol Nabokov himself was to single out as "excellent." Sound in its facts, trenchant and nuanced in its critical formulations, it ignores the weak categories of its predecessors to insist on the primacy of art, and to make crucial distinctions: "Gogol's work was satirical, but not in the ordinary sense. It was not objective, but subjective, satire. His characters were not realistic caricatures of the world without, but introspective caricatures of the fauna of his own mind. . . . [*The Inspector General*] and *Dead Souls* were satires of self, and of Russia and mankind only in so far as Russia and mankind reflected that self."[15] Mirsky singles out the self-justifying verbal expressiveness of Gogol's writing, together with "the extraordinary intensity and vividness of his *sight*": "He saw the outer world in a way that is incommensurable with our ordinary vision . . . and even when he saw the same details as we do, they acquired such proportions in his vision as to become entirely different in meaning and measure."[16] And Mirsky cites "the untranslatable Russian word *poshlost*" (which Nabokov's book was to give currency in English) to designate "the aspect under which [Gogol] sees reality."[17] All in all, "his imaginative work . . . is one of the most marvelous, unexpected, in the strictest sense original, worlds ever created by an artist of words. If mere creative force is to be the standard of valuation, Gogol is the greatest of Russian writers."[18]

Here was the field Nabokov was being asked to enter: two foolish and avowedly ignorant caricatures of Gogol, and one accurate, trenchant, but summary account that excluded Gogol's own voice on principle. It would, of course, require a verbal artist of rare gifts to provide a version of that voice in

English; that, unquestionably, was part of Nabokov's challenge. Then, too, he was still in the process of establishing himself as a writer on the American scene. Ten years before, he had remarked on the closeness to Western culture he had felt while living in Russia—and how, once he had emigrated to the West, as if in compensation, he had found himself experiencing the "fascination" *(obaianie)* of Gogol "with particular acuteness."[19]

The invitation to write a book introducing Gogol to the English reader thus offered multiple opportunities. It could explode the still-prevalent schoolboy version of Gogol as a satirist and humorist, and seek to undo the way "an improbable conjunction of circumstances" had promoted "one of the greatest irrealists of world literature to something like office manager of Russian realism."[20] In so doing it would, with sly indirection, offer an authoritative statement on the question of Nabokov and Gogol, so often raised by émigré critics, by highlighting key elements of Gogol's poetics—which, not surprisingly, turn out to be the Nabokovian elements.

The works chosen for comment are taken to comprise "the essential Gogol," but even there a certain frivolousness leaves the great short story "Diary of a Madman"—great even by Nabokov's standards—undiscussed; it figures only as the source of the book's epigraph, surfacing one more time in the "Chronology" at the end of the book under a different name.[21] "The Nose," surely a key text in any account of Gogol's poetics, gets no more than a passing salute as "his remarkable nightmare" (158).[22] Only three Gogolian masterpieces receive extended if lopsided comment: *The Government Inspector*, *Dead Souls*, and "The Overcoat." All are presented as "poetry in action," to the accompaniment of comments attacking the importance of plot or ideas, purpose of any kind ("satire," "realism"), and alleged truth to "life" or "reality" (both of which abstractions are vigorously denied any serious content). Moreover, Nabokov's comments themselves take the form of "poetry in action": his insistence on the supremacy of style in Gogol underlies his own formulations as well, so that paraphrase can only present banal caricatures—a point of some importance to which I shall return.

"Gogol's true kingdom," according to Nabokov, is the "secondary world" of dream creatures and objects that "pop out at every turn of the play (or novel, or story), to flaunt for a second their life-like existence" (52, 42). They constitute the "irrational background" (52) that keeps looming through chinks in the surface of his prose, requiring of the reader each time "a sudden focal shift." And this shifting from foreground to fleetingly-perceived background "is the very basis of his art," what made him "the greatest artist that Russia has yet produced" (140). The effect it creates is one of absurdity, a capacious term which in Nabokov's usage borders on the tragic. Far from "something provoking a chuckle or a shrug" (141), it is the area into which the most important elements of human life are translated to create yet another of those

most important elements, art. Nabokov explains: "If [by 'absurd' you mean] the pathetic, the human condition, . . . all such things that in less weird worlds are linked up with the loftiest aspirations, the deepest sufferings, the strongest passions—then of course the necessary breach is there, and a pathetic human, lost in the midst of Gogol's nightmarish, irresponsible world would be 'absurd,' by a kind of secondary contrast" (141). The comment on life is not inside the work, it is the work itself, in its inviolable autonomy.

The most frequently repeated words in *Nikolai Gogol* are "irrational," "dream," and, as a special intensification of dream, "nightmare." The characters of Gogol's great "dream play" (54) are "nightmare people" (42); the town in *Dead Souls* is "a nightmare town" (90) within "that kaleidoscopic nightmare" (114), "the tremendous dream of the book" (107). "*The Overcoat* is a grotesque and grim nightmare making black holes in the dim pattern of life" (140), its sentences liable to explode "in a wild display of nightmare fireworks" (142).

The irrational is primordial. (What, Nabokov once asked, "can be more irrational and at the same time closer to the essence of things than smells?"[23]) Dreams touch the primordial: "A dream is a show—a theatrical piece staged within the brain in a subdued light before a somewhat muddleheaded audience. . . . [T]he actors and the props and the various parts of the setting are borrowed by the dream producer from our conscious life. . . . Now and then the waking mind discovers a pattern of sense in last night's dream; and if this pattern is very striking or somehow coincides with our conscious emotions at their deepest, then the dream may be held together and repeated. . . ." (*LRL* 176). Nightmares add the element of anxiety to that pattern of sense. Shaped by art as Nabokov found them to be in Shakespeare and Flaubert as well, they move us by the way "dream-logic, or perhaps better say nightmare-logic, replaces . . . the elements of dramatic determinism" and dazzle with intimations of the uncanny.[24] Writing in Russian some eight years after the Gogol book, Nabokov summed up the rationale for concentrating on the texture of his subject's prose: "However many times in his life a nomadic reader may chance to find himself by a shelf that holds a tattered volume of Gogol, bursting with life (amid a crowd of other books, intact but quite dead), Gogol will always astonish him with his magically vivifying novelty and his ever-deepening layers of meaning. As if a man has awakened on a moonlit night in a shabby shadow-striped hotel room and, before sinking again into insensibility, hears on the other side of the thin wall that seems to be melting in the gray light the muffled rumor of what sounds at first like a quietly playful orchestra: nonsensical and at the same time infinitely important speeches; a mixture of strange, broken voices speaking of human existence, now with the hysterical crackling of wings being spread, now with anxious nocturnal muttering. It is in this contact with some adjacent universe, I believe, that the instantly-felt magic and the timeless significance of the Petersburg Tales consists."[25] Here is an example of how, after reading Gogol, "one's eyes may become gogolized"

(144)—proof of how the genuine artist always, as Nabokov declares more than once in *Nikolai Gogol*, creates his reader.

It was a "gogolized" Nabokov who undertook this critical book, inviting his readers to "get rid of conventional values in literature and follow the author along the dream road of his superhuman imagination" (144). The author is Gogol, but the hyperbole is Nabokov's, and it is a sign of the way homage here gives way to assertions of implied parity, bringing in their wake intimations of rivalry, the gogolized Nabokov going on to nabokovize Gogol. To say of Gogol's style that "it gives one the sensation of something ludicrous and at the same time stellar, lurking constantly around the corner" (143) is more confessional than critical—and more elusively poetic than either.

Reviewing this book at the time of its first publication, Edmund Wilson recognized it as "the kind of book which can only be written by one artist about another," and went on to observe that Nabokov had "done Gogol a certain amount of violence in trying to apply to him his usual [novelist's] methods of portraiture," omitting "considerable areas of his life and work" and showing a certain caprice in the areas he did choose to consider.[26]

The insight here is fundamental. The implied (and created) reader of *Nikolai Gogol* is simultaneously gogolized and nabokovized—more surely and completely the latter than the former. On page 2 the narrator steps between his narrative of Gogol's deathbed agonies and the reader to comment that the scene he has described is not only unpleasant but has "a human appeal which I deplore," and the last sentence of the text ("Desperate Russian critics, trying hard to find an Influence and to pigeonhole my own novels . . .") concludes a chapter that has gradually shifted attention from Gogol to his portraitist, finally leaving the latter alone on the page.[27] The manner throughout has been grotesque in the sense of being oddly and unaccountably malproportioned. The attention to Gogol (as distinct from his writings) has been an exercise in quasi-fictional character creation which the dazzled reader realizes at some point must include the "Nabokov" of this book as well.[28] How important are these signs of a critical work tempted to metamorphose into something else? Not very. It is a miracle that the book manages to illuminate so much of the Gogol problem (especially considering that it never tries to formulate that problem). The sustained if quirky elegance of the writing is such as to ensure the lasting value of the book even if it were discovered that its subject had, like Nabokov's apocryphal Pierre Delalande, never existed.[29] Even in that hypothetical case, two memorable characters, "Gogol" and "Nabokov," would have been created and given incandescent life in what will remain a scintillating primer on anti-realist esthetics.

Donald Fanger

NOTES

1. Bely, "Gogol'." For a fuller account, see Fanger, and the introduction to Maguire.
2. De Jonge, p. 63.
3. Bayley, p. 44.
4. On Gogol, see Rozanov; on Nabokov, see Ellen Pifer, 1980, for a summary and refutation.
5. The largest such instance is Nabokov's play of 1938, *The Event*, which was recognized at the time as a variant on Gogol's *The Government Inspector*; see Khodasevich, "'Sobytie' V. Sirina," p. 425; Karlinsky, 1967, pp. 186–87; Boyd, 1990, pp. 480ff. For examples of other such connections: On style: Bitsilli, 1970; Rowe, "Gogolesque Perception," Rowe, "Observations on Black Humor." On *Invitation to a Beheading:* Ludmila Foster, 1974; Osokin (cited in Grayson, p. 236). On *Lolita*: Bayley, p. 48; Appel (in Bloom, *Vladimir Nabokov's* Lolita), p. 42. On *Pnin*: Hyde, ch. 7 ("A Debt to Gogol: Pnin") and passim; Field, 1986, p. 294; Grabes, 1975. On *The Gift*: Boyd, 1990, pp. 460, 465.
6. *SO* 156; Boyd, 1991, p. 54.
7. *Eugene Onegin*, II, p. 314.
8. Bowie, "Nabokov's Influence," p. 265.
9. Quoted in Boyd, 1990, pp. 128–29.
10. Hapgood, p. 146; my italics.
11. Ibid., p. 152.
12. Ibid., p. 157.
13. Ibid.
14. Baring, pp. 38, 43, 48; my italics.
15. Mirsky, 1927, p. 187.
16. Ibid., pp. 190, 191.
17. Ibid., p. 193.
18. Ibid., p. 190.
19. Interview with Vladimir Sedykh in *Poslednie novosti*, 1934; quoted in Grayson, p. 218.
20. Nabokov-Sirin, ed., *Povesti*, by Nikolai Gogol, p. ii.
21. For a list of inconsistencies and downright inaccuracies, see Bowie ("A Note"); to it should be added Nabokov's egregious error in reporting that Bernard Guerney had "excellently rendered [into English] *Dead Souls*, *The Inspector General* and *The Overcoat*" (153), when he had in fact translated only the first-named.
22. In the Russian-language preface to his New York edition of Gogol's Petersburg Tales, Nabokov names this story along with "The Overcoat," *The Government Inspector*, and *Dead Souls* as works in which Gogol's gifts are fully on display (Nabokov–Sirin, p. ii).
23. Ibid., p. iii.
24. The passage, from a lecture on tragedy delivered at Stanford University in 1941, deserves citation in full: "I referred to Shakespeare's two greatest plays [*King Lear* and *Hamlet*] as dream-tragedies, and in the same sense I would have called Gogol's *Revizor* a dream-play, or Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* a dream-novel. My definition has certainly nothing to do with that special brand of pretentious 'dream-play' which was at one time popular, and which was really regulated by the most wide-awake causality, if not by worse things such as Freudianism. I call *King Lear* or *Hamlet* dream-tragedies

because dream-logic, or perhaps better say nightmare-logic, replaces here the elements of dramatic determinism" (*USSR* 327). A companion text is his lecture, "The Art of Literature and Commonsense" (in *Lectures on Literature*); see especially p. 373, with its remarks on "the emphatically and unshakably illogical world" which he claims "as a home for the spirit," and his celebration of standards at once "irrational and divine."

25. Nabokov–Sirin, ed., *Povesti*, by Nikolai Gogol, p. vi-vii.
26. Wilson, 1944, pp. 65, 66.
27. Bowie ("Nabokov's Influence") finds in that shift a suggestion "that Nabokov may have started writing a book about Gogol but then changed his mind and decided to write one about himself" (p. 259).
28. Nabokov characteristically wrote out and revised his responses to interviewers, as if to underline the fact that "Nabokov" could only appear in print as an ad hoc artifact, a talking head of his own creation. Bowie ("Nabokov's Influence") concludes that the liberties he takes in the Gogol book make of him "a semi-fictional biographer, engaged in the usual pursuits of a Nabokovian fictional narrator" (p. 260), and so introduce an element of self-parody that tugs him in the direction of "the companion work" to this, the novel *Pnin* (p. 263).
29. This is a point the author acknowledges he may have encouraged the reader to entertain. "I have not imagined Gogol," he insists. "He really wrote, he really lived" (*NG* 150).

NABOKOV AND GUMILEV

Nabokov acknowledged that he saw himself as being a product of the period 1905–17 in Russian literary culture (see the article on "Nabokov and Bely" in this volume). Although it would be a mistake to oversimplify the diversity of this time, it is still a fair approximation to say that much of its most impressive poetry and prose was written by writers who are usually classified as belonging to movements known in Russian literary history as "Symbolism" and "Acmeism."[1] Indeed, if we neglect several other major writers who fall outside these categories (such as the "neo-Realist" Ivan Bunin, whose poetry Nabokov admired), it is in Acmeism that we find the kind of celebration of sensual details and of perceptual acuity that is one of Nabokov's hallmarks. And it is Symbolism that cultivated the kind of metaphysical dualism—or division between what is visible and a spiritual reality—that underlies Nabokov's depictions of phenomena in this world (see the articles on Nabokov, Bely, and Blok in the present volume). Nabokov's art can thus be thought of as a unique fusion of distinctive features from both these movements.

Of all the Acmeists, Nikolai Gumilev (1886–1921) plays the most obvious, and possibly the most interesting role in Nabokov's *oeuvre*. The

nature of his influence differs from that of Bely and Blok, however, because it includes not only literary themes and style but also the poet's persona.

Among Nabokov's earliest published references to Gumilev is the heartfelt but somewhat awkward panegyric "To the Memory of Gumilev" ("Pamiati Gumileva"): "You died proudly and brilliantly, you died as the Muse taught. Now in Elysian quiet, there converses with you about the flying bronze Peter and about the wild African winds—Pushkin" ("Gordo i iasno ty umer, umer, kak Muza uchila. / Nyne, v tishy Eliseiskoi, s toboi govorit o letiashchem / mednom Petre i o dikikh vetrakh afrikanskikh—Pushkin" ; *Stikhi* 95, dated 19.3.23).

Some fifty years later, Nabokov again wrote a poem about Gumilev: "How I loved Gumilev's poems! I cannot reread them, but traces, for example, of this kind of strum have remained in my brain: '. . . And I will die not in a summer-house, from gluttony and hot weather, but with a celestial butterfly in my net on the top of a wild mountain'" ("Kak liubil ia stikhi Gumileva! / perechityvat' ikh ne mogu, / no sledy, naprimer, vot takogo / perebora ostalis' v mozgu: / '. . . I umru ia ne v letnei besedke / ot obzhorstva i ot zhary, / a s nebesnoi babochkoi v setke / na vershine dikoi gory'"; *Stikhi* 297, dated 22.7.72). Thus, although Nabokov's admiration for much of Gumilev's poetry had faded since the time he placed him in Pushkin's exalted company, the existential stance Gumilev assumes in his verse continued to retain its charm for Nabokov.

Gumilev's heroism, adventurousness, cult of artistic craftsmanship, poetic achievement, and tragic end at the hands of the Bolsheviks, who executed him for an alleged conspiracy against them, are all part of his legacy. Nabokov makes this image central to the lecture "The Art of Literature and Commonsense," which is one of the most revealing things about his own beliefs that Nabokov ever published (collected in *LL*). I would like therefore to concentrate on it, and to pass over the interesting matter of Gumilev's influence on Nabokov's own verse, a promising subject that still awaits its investigator (reflected in such untranslated poems as "Iasnookii, kak rytsar' iz rati Khristovoi" [*Stikhi* 68, dated 1.12.22], "Avtobus" [*Stikhi* 120–21, dated 5.10.23], and "Ia Indiiei nevidimoi vladeiu" [*Stikhi* 125, 7.12.23]).[2]

Gumilev appears in "The Art of Literature and Commonsense" as the embodiment of all the virtues that Nabokov values: "One of the main reasons why the very gallant Russian poet Gumilev was put to death by Lenin's ruffians thirty odd years ago was that during the whole ordeal, in the prosecutor's dim office, in the torture house, in the winding corridors that led to the truck, in the truck that took him to the place of execution, and at that place itself, full of the shuffling feet of the clumsy and gloomy shooting squad, the poet kept smiling" (*LL* 376–77). Far from being frivolous bravado, Gumilev's smile is a sure sign that in a moral sense he is unassailably superior to those who would destroy him. Moreover, since the smile denotes that Gumilev possesses the heightened perspicacity and consciousness that are prerequisites for the epiphanic state that Nabokov calls "cosmic synchronization" in *Speak, Memory*

(and "inspiration" in the lecture), he emerges as an artist–hero graced by contact with the otherworld and with all that this implies for Nabokov about the immortality of the soul (see the article on "The Otherworld" in this volume).

Perhaps the most significant evocation of a Gumilev-like personage in Nabokov's *oeuvre* appears in *The Gift*, when Fyodor speculates about how his father might have died after capture by the Reds. The telling details in the passage are the father's "smile of disdain" at the firing squad and his following with a glance of encouragement a whitish moth just before the Bolsheviks open fire (137). This last detail is the quintessential Nabokovian privileged perception, as he makes clear in "The Art of Literature and Commonsense." In connection with this, it is worth recalling that in her "Preface" to her husband's posthumous collection of poems Nabokov's widow singled out the image of the father in *The Gift* as an excellent illustration of what the otherworld meant for Nabokov himself (*Stikhi* 3–4).

The heroic spirit of Gumilev can also be found in Nabokov's *Glory* (*Podvig*, 1932). Although the poet is not named in the novel, the qualities that Nabokov associated with him are the main inspiration behind Martin's heroic fantasies (e.g., 16), including how he imagines he might be executed at dawn (182). There are also specific Gumilev subtexts in the novel as well as some that are more speculative.[3] One of the minor characters is the writer Bubnov, whom the narrator presents as being highly talented and appealingly eccentric. He is in the process of writing "a book" about Christopher Columbus or more precisely about a Russian "scrivener" who miraculously joins the crew of one of his ships (140). Since this constitutes a sort of "Russification" of the epoch-making voyage, it may be worth recalling that a Russian narrative poem about Columbus, entitled *The Discovery of America* (*Otkrytie Ameriki*), had already been published by Gumilev in 1910.[4] The references to "The Muse of Distant Wanderings" ("Muza Dal'nikh Stranstvii") in Gumilev's poem—which constitute an implicit equation between artistic creation and voyaging—is relevant for Martin throughout *Glory*, even though he is an artist only with regard to his own life, in particular when he crosses the border into "Zoorland" at the end of the novel. (It is relevant as well for Fyodor in *The Gift*, where part of the description of his creative process is rendered in terms of travel imagery—specifically, his father's expeditions through Central Asia). Martin's seemingly pointless act is intertwined with the theme of his thwarted love for Sonia, and recalls the image of gratuitous heroic ecstasy in the conclusion of Gumilev's poem "Devushke" ("To the Young Woman," 1912): "And alien to you is that mad hunter, who, having climbed a steep cliff, in drunken joy, in inexplicable anguish, releases an arrow straight into the sun" ("I vam chuzhd tot bezumnyi okhotnik, / Chto, vzoidia na krutuiu skalu, / V p'ianom schast'e, v toske bezotchetnoi / Priamo v solntse puskaet strelu"; vol. I, p. 156). The connection between this poem and Nabokov's celebration of romantic heroism is buttressed by the very similar sentiment he expressed in a newspaper article from

1921, in which he tries to distinguish between Russians and Englishmen (there is something of the traditional conception of English reserve in the image of the "Turgenev heroine"-like girl in Gumilev's poem): the latter "do not know that whirlwind of inspiration, pulsation, radiance, that furious dance, that malevolence and tenderness, which transport us [Russians] into God-only-knows-what heavens and abysses; we have moments when the clouds are about our shoulders and the sea about our knees—go free, my soul! For an Englishman this is incomprehensible, unheard of, yes, and alluring."[5] Even later, in his 1937 lecture on Pushkin, Nabokov continued to find attractive the existential stance of Gumilev's hunter: "in reality the mountain wind is as thrilling as ever, and to die pursuing high adventure remains forever an axiom of human pride."[6]

The theme of dangerous adventure constitutes a textual echo between one of Gumilev's travel pieces and the conclusion of *Invitation to a Beheading*. In the last paragraph of "An African Hunt: From a Travel Diary" ("Afrikanskaia okhota: Iz putevogo dnevnika," 1916) Gumilev asks himself why he is not troubled by killing one animal after another for entertainment, and why his blood tie to the world is only strengthened by it. He then concludes with the following sentence, which provides an implicit answer to these questions by suggesting that he, too, will die, and that death is not final: "And at night I dreamt that for participating in some sort of Abyssinian palace revolt my head was chopped off, and that, bleeding profusely, I am applauding the executioner's skill and rejoicing in how simple, good, and completely painless it all is" ("A noch'iu mne prisnilos', chto za uchastie v kakom-to abissinskom dvortsovom perevorote mne otrubili golovu, i ia, istekaia krov'iu, aplodiruiu umen'iu palacha i raduius', kak vse eto prosto, khorosho i sovsem ne bol'no"; vol. IV, p. 152). The reference to a dream, the method of execution, the devaluation of death, and the victim's implied transcendence all recall Cincinnatus' experiences, reactions, and behavior. Nabokov would presumably not have approved of Gumilev's celebration of hunting because of its inherent cruelty. But because Gumilev was executed by the Bolsheviks for complicity in an anti-governmental plot (a sort of "palace revolt"), it is possible that Nabokov saw the passage in question as literally prophetic. Moreover, given the implications of immortality surrounding the image of Gumilev in "The Art of Literature and Commonsense," it is quite possible that Nabokov would have shared as well the most far-reaching aspect of Gumilev's prophetic dream.

The views that Gumilev expressed in his own writings on literature are perfectly in harmony with the image Nabokov made him play in "The Art of Literature and Commonsense." Indeed, Gumilev's discursive writings function as "subtexts" for several of the lecture's most important points. In a review from 1910 in which he speaks of satire, Gumilev provides virtually the same definition of "common sense" ("zdravyi smysl") as Nabokov elaborated for "commonsense": "It is completely clear to me that a good satirist absolutely needs *a certain dullness of perception and limitation to his range of interests, that*

what in daily life is called common sense" ("dlia menia nesomnenno, chto dlia khoroshego satirika neobkhodima izvestnaia tupost' vospriiatii i ogranichennost' krugozora, to est' to, chto v obshchezhitii nazyvaetsia zdravym smyslom"; vol. IV, p. 239; italics added). A further parallel with Nabokov's lecture can be found in Gumilev's essay "Chitatel'" ("The Reader," first published in Berlin in 1923, where Nabokov was then living), in which he describes poetic creation via imagery that is very close to Nabokov's: the moment of inspiration is "an entirely special feeling, which sometimes fills one with such trembling that it would hamper speech were it not accompanied by a victorious feeling, by an awareness that you are creating perfect combinations of words, comparable to those *that once resurrected the dead*, that destroyed walls" ("sovsem osobennoe chuvstvo, inogda napolniaiushchee takim trepetom, chto ono meshalo by govorit', esli by ne soputstvuiushchee emu chuvstvo pobednosti, soznanie togo, chto tvorish' sovershennye sochetaniia slov, podobnye tem, kotorye nekogda voskreshali mertvykh, razrushali steny"; vol. IV, p. 178; italics added). Nabokov's description of the epiphanic moment in his lecture is "you experience a shuddering sensation of wild magic, of *some inner resurrection, as if a dead man were revived* by a sparkling drug which has been rapidly mixed in your presence" (*LL* 378; italics added). Gumilev also speaks of the elasticity of time that poets can experience during epiphanic moments in a way that recalls Nabokov's description of cosmic synchronization: "Eternity and the moment—these are already not temporal concepts, and for this reason can be perceived during any interval of time; everything depends on *the synthesizing ascent of contemplation*" ("vechnost' i mig—eto uzhe ne vremennye poniatiia i poetomu mogut vosprinimat'sia v liuboi promezhutok vremeni; vse zavisit ot *sintezuiushchego pod'ema sozertsaniia*"; IV, p. 335; italics added). The fact that this conclusion follows Gumilev's celebration of the variety of earthly existence brings the idea even closer to Nabokov's.

The belief in a transcendent that Gumilev reveals in his discursive writings, and especially vividly in his later poetry, is particularly close to Nabokov's. Indeed, the following passage from Gumilev's programmatic piece "The Legacy of Symbolism and Acmeism" ("Nasledie Simvolizma i Akmeizma," 1913) could serve as a perfect description of Nabokov's faith, as he expressed it in "The Art of Literature and Commonsense," *Speak, Memory*, and his novels: "To always remember the unknowable, but not to offend one's thought about it with more or less probable conjectures—this is the principle of Acmeism. This does not mean that [Acmeism] rejects the right to depict the soul during those moments when it approaches that which is other; but then [the soul] must only shudder" ("Vsegda pomnit' o nepoznavaemom, no ne oskorbliat' svoei mysli o nem bolee ili menee veroiatnymi dogadkami—vot printsip akmeizma. Eto ne znachit, chtoby on otvergal dlia sebia pravo izobrazhat' dushu v te momenty, kogda ona drozhit, priblizhaias' k inomu; no togda ona dolzhna tol'ko sodrogat'sia"; vol. IV, p. 175). These views of Gumilev's are integrated into his specifically aesthetic ideals in a way that again

recalls Nabokov's works. In "The Legacy of Symbolism and Acmeism" Gumilev advocates "a bright irony that does not undermine the roots of our faith" ("svetlaia ironiia, ne podryvaiushchaia kornei nashei very") and states that one of Acmeism's principles is "to always follow the path of greatest resistance" ("vsegda idti po linii naibol'shego soprotivleniia"; vol. IV, p. 173). Both statements can serve as capsule summaries of Nabokov's artistic praxis.

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NOTES

1. For brief overviews, see the relevant entries in Terras, 1985.
2. Field, 1977, p. 29, quotes Nabokov as saying that he "may have been influenced" in his youthful literary reviews by "the spirit of cruel criticism of the sort that Gumilyov wrote." Nabokov adds, however, that this critical style "was also current in English journals of the time when I was young." See also Boyd, 1990, p. 94. Irena and Omry Ronen, p. 372, note an allusion to Gumilev's poem "Zabludivshiisia tramvai" in Nabokov's last novel *Look at the Harlequins!*, p. 246.
3. See also Tammi, 1992.
4. *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. I, pp. 199–208. Hereafter, all volume and page references will be given in the text.
5. Quoted by Field, 1967, pp. 63–64.
6. "Pushkin, or the Real and the Plausible," p. 42; "Pouchkine, ou le vrai et le vraisemblable," p. 378.

NABOKOV AND JOYCE

Vladimir Nabokov operated a landfill for literary reputations into which he tipped any number of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries' prominent authors and their acclaimed works. Thus Conan Doyle, Kipling, Conrad, Chesterton, and Oscar Wilde get dumped because they "are essentially writers for very young people." Galsworthy, Dreiser, Tagore, Gorky, and Romain Rolland, lumped together as "formidable mediocrities . . . [who] used to be accepted as geniuses," go in. Meeting the same fate are "Mann's asinine *Death in Venice*, Pasternak's melodramatic and vilely written *Zhivago* . . . [and] Faulkner's corncobby chronicles." These, Nabokov says, have been mistaken for masterpieces by journalists suffering from delusions—just as "when a hypnotized person makes love to a chair" (*SO* 57).

Conspicuously escaping the Nabokovian dispose-all is Joyce's *Ulysses*, though not much else by Joyce, certainly not *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* ("feeble and garrulous"), or *Finnegans Wake* ("a formless and dull mass of phony folklore, a cold pudding") (*SO* 71). Nabokov ranked *Ulysses* first on a

meager list of greatest masterpieces of twentieth-century prose he recited to an interviewer in 1965. The others were Kafka's *Transformation* (sic), Bely's *Petersburg*, and "the first half of Proust's fairy tale *In Search of Lost Time*" (*SO* 57). About *Dubliners*, the play *Exiles*, and the early draft of *A Portrait*, issued as *Stephen Hero* in 1944, and about Joyce's occasional ventures in verse Nabokov does not speak. For the creator of *The Gift*, *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, *Ada* and the rest, Joyce is praiseworthy only as the creator of *Ulysses*. It is that "divine work of art . . . [which] will live on despite the academic nonentities who turn it into a collection of symbols or Greek myths." When he adds, "Oh, yes, let people compare me to Joyce by all means, but my English is patball to Joyce's champion game," his reference is exclusively to the game and match Joyce played and won in the three parts and eighteen chapter episodes of *Ulysses* (*SO* 55–56).

Despite his declared admiration for *Ulysses* Nabokov claimed to have learned from the Irish master precisely "nothing" (*SO* 102). When *Ulysses* was published in 1922 he was apparently too intent on launching his own literary career in the Russian language to pay much attention. It was not until the early 1950s, after he had moved to America and was preparing to teach at Cornell a course called Masterpieces of European Fiction, a two-semester lecture series he continued to offer to large undergraduate audiences until 1959, that he gave Joyce's masterpiece the thorough study it demands. In Nabokov's own words, "My first real contact with *Ulysses*, after a leering glimpse in the early twenties, was in the thirties at a time when I was definitely formed as a writer and immune to any literary influence. I studied *Ulysses* seriously only much later, in the fifties, when preparing my Cornell courses. That was the best part of the education I received at Cornell. *Ulysses* towers over the rest of Joyce's writings, and in comparison to its noble originality and unique lucidity of thought and style the unfortunate *Finnegans Wake* is nothing but a formless and dull mass of phony folklore, a cold pudding of a book, a persistent snore in the next room" (*SO* 71).

That may be. Nevertheless, the two authors appear to a number of thoughtful readers to be significantly linked—this either in the line of highly crafted and self-conscious fiction that is thought to originate in Gustave Flaubert, with its emphasis on the autonomy of literary art and artist, on purity of style ("le mot juste"), on impersonality, objectivity, and aesthetic distance, on a magisterial control over the materials of fiction exercised by a detached and virtually invisible author/narrator; or else the connection is made in terms of the two authors' similar delight in and mastery over the plastic verbal medium, and through their deliberate manipulation of various generic features and conventions of prose fiction, as if these were mere counters in a series of cool, planned, skillful, and occasionally mischievous artistic games.

Apart from their both stressing a writer's knowing control over his or her fictional procedures and product, the two models of prose fiction just described are very different, though not always seen to be different. The Flaubertian

model in all its rigor and purity, would have been best fulfilled in the Frenchman's speculative project, never actually carried out, of writing a novel lacking subject matter drawn from life, a book about nothing at all, which would be shaped and sustained entirely by the reciprocal tensions of its perfect style: "What I should like to write is a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the strength of its style, just as the earth, suspended in the void, depends on nothing external for its support." [1]

If this project were ever to be accomplished, and it may be that Samuel Beckett came close in some of his later highly abstract and virtually characterless performance pieces and so-called "Shorts," it would not be by either Joyce or Nabokov. That is because all their works are rich, even rank, with externality, with subject matter, characters, scenes, idiom, and themes fished from the sordid tide of actuality, rich also with borrowings, allusions, parodies, and reworkings of material taken from previous literature and other arts. In discussing *Ulysses* Nabokov consistently denies that Homer and the Odyssey contributed anything essential to its texture and structure—one wonders where he imagined Joyce found the title!—yet in *Lectures on* Ulysses*: A Facsimile of the Manuscript* he accounts for Bloom as a character in part by connecting him to medieval and gothic legends of the Wandering Jew as well as to Don Quixote's sly and earthy servant, Sancho Panza.

Along comparable lines, one may wish to read *Ada* chiefly for the style, even though its expensive freightage of allusion, parody, inside jokes, punning and other word play in the three languages, Russian, French, and English, that Nabokov had mastered is always making the style of *Ada* something quite different from what Flaubert means by style. If, however, one hopes to come to terms with a major character such as Lucinda Durmanov ("Lucette"), whose ruined life and agonized dying are more movingly rendered than anything else in *Ada*, one should know something about the painter Balthus and his predilection for painting little girls, and about Lermontov's narrative poem *The Demon*, including its reworking as an opera by Anton Rubinstein and as a series of paintings by Mikhail Vrubel'.[2] It might also be mentioned that Lucette calls up the figure of Olga, Tatiana's younger sister in the Tchaikovsky opera based on Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, a work which Nabokov had loathed being dragged to as a child in pre-Revolutionary St. Petersburg and which he always claimed to despise in adulthood. Having said so much, one is aware of having barely scratched the very highly worked surfaces of either *Ulysses* or *Ada*.

It will help to remove Joyce and Nabokov from the Flaubertian line or school before further considering their connections with each other. Nabokov offers some guidance here. When Alfred Appel, Jr., in 1966 quoted to his former Cornell professor famous Flaubertian lines from Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait* on the type of artist "who remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails," and asked Nabokov whether he might be consciously "answering"

Joyce in *Pale Fire* through figures like Kinbote and Shade the poet, who as "makers" are anything but invisible or indifferent to the work being made, Nabokov replied, "Neither Kinbote nor Shade, nor their maker, is answering Joyce in *Pale Fire*. Actually, I never liked *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*." Appel had thought that Shade's "I stand before the window and I pare / My fingernails" (*PF* 39) echoed, perhaps mockingly, Stephen's lines about the detached artist. To that Nabokov responded, "The phrase you quote is an unpleasant coincidence" (*SO* 70–71).

In light of his denial Appel had little choice but to make the case for associating Joyce and Nabokov in ways that avoid raising the ghost of Flaubert. That is what he does in his prefatory remarks to *The Annotated Lolita* (1970, 1991). There he says, "*Lolita* is surely the most allusive and linguistically playful novel in English since *Ulysses*," going on to call it a work of "involuted and constantly evolving means." He also calls *Lolita* "elusive" to a degree that puts it with Melville's *The Confidence Man* (*AnL* xi). Whatever is meant here, Appel cannot mean that *Lolita* is in the stylish and stylistic line of prose fiction traceable to Flaubert.

In an essay of 1974, "Lolita and Pure Art," Michael Bell argues that Humbert, while remaining the depraved wretch we know him to be, holds to high Flaubertian standards of style as the author of the confession forming the book. In the end it is through the control exercised by this style that he is able to grasp the heinousness of his crime, become penitent, and condemn himself.[3] It is a peculiar argument in so far as it puts purity of style and what the New Critics called "technique as discovery" in place of conscience as spiritual agency, and then puts these resources at the disposal of a wicked literary character who knows how, we pretend, to write well. Bell takes his argument so far as to call Humbert's late change of heart analogous to a religious revelation. That is about as far from Appel's approach to *Lolita* in terms of aesthetic games as a reader can get.

Joyce and Nabokov are sometimes connected through a presumed similarity in their experiences of uprooting and exile in foreign lands. There may be less here than meets the eye. In all of Joyce's writing there is but a single reference to himself as an exile. This comes in an early essay (1907) where he imagines himself visiting the neglected grave of the nineteenth century Irish *poète maudit* James Clarence Mangan, causing "a disturbance of his spectral quiet . . . by a countryman in exile."[4] Joyce was not driven from Ireland but went abroad in search of better conditions in which to pursue a literary calling than were to be found in the provincial backwaters of turn-of-the-century Dublin. Stephen Dedalus' credo of "silence, exile and cunning" was certainly not Joyce's. He was always free to revisit Ireland as the spirit moved him, though he usually preferred taking his holidays in England. Joyce was a sort of Irish nationalist but never surrendered his British passport for an Irish one when they became available after the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921 which brought the Irish Free State into being. Like most other Irish writers of quality

during the 1930s, Joyce was the victim of the Irish Censorship Act which banned his books in the Irish Republic until seven years after his death. But this and other frustrations he experienced from his native land fall well short of a forced exile.

Nabokov, on the other hand, would certainly have been silenced and probably jailed or even liquidated if he had returned to Russia without making a total submission to the Soviet authorities. Even with submission he was unlikely to have survived the systematic repression and purges which destroyed so many of Russia's cultural elite between the two world wars. As a consequence of his expatriation Nabokov suffered the confiscation of a large property and fortune, not to mention the loss of an enviable social position won by the accomplishments of distinguished parents and ancestors. Living as a genuine exile in Berlin and Paris, and travelling on the very restricted Nansen passport used by refugees and other stateless persons, he could only begin a further exile by escaping to America in May 1940 as France fell to the Nazis.

It is noteworthy that Nabokov never describes his life in this complaining way. He frequently treats particular ordeals of exile as opportunities for discovery, some of them quite magical. Travelling in the western United States in pursuit of lepidoptera, he found that the scene was somehow in continuity with those vistas of Trans-Caucasian and Central Asian Russia he had once dreamed of visiting in the footsteps of nineteenth-century explorers. He found in academic circles at Harvard, Wellesley, and Cornell friends and colleagues far more congenial than many of the émigré groups he had known in Western Europe and for whom his Russian-language books were perforce written. When he took U.S. citizenship he was claiming a loyalty to America as his final patriotic disposition. This did not, however, stop him from settling in Montreux, Switzerland, for the last sixteen years of his life. America was best experienced, he told one interviewer, in a state of retrospective nostalgia (*SO* 49). Nabokov had learned the trick of it early, by losing Russia in reality and regaining it in speaking memory and imagination. It became possible to do with America in Montreux what he had formerly done with the lost Russian years while living in Germany, France, and the United States.

There is little doubt that Nabokov came to understand exile or expatriation as a description or metaphor of the human condition itself. To be born is to be sent absent from a felicity one may spend a lifetime attempting to return to, never succeeding, except in the flashes of memory and of spiritual intuition which art is curiously adept at recapturing. In this conception he is probably closer to Wordsworth than to Joyce even though there is a superficial resemblance between the famous Joycean "epiphany" and Nabokovian privileged moments. The older writer took his aesthetics from Thomas Aquinas, stripping away the religious metaphysic and any necessary belief in a Divine Creator. Nabokov, on the other hand, issues straight from high Romanticism, and from Symbolism, which is Romanticism in final efflorescent decay.

Ellen Pifer in "Nabokov and the Art of Exile"[5] is one recent critic who finds the exilic theme to be the master key for all of Nabokov's work. By embracing homelessness Nabokov was able to escape the conventional social formulations served by most novelists, elude the pressure of what Mary McCarthy called the novelist's duty of "carrying the news." Once this duty to mundane reality has been cancelled, "home becomes that remote but essential reality which the artist's imagination and memory struggle 'unquenchably' to discover and repossess" (220), though without reentering. This reality without quotation marks ("Reality, better say, lost the quotes it wore like claws" [*Ada* 220]) will seem singular, idiosyncratic, possibly sinister and even crazed, as when Alice–Ania in Nabokov's early translation of Lewis Carroll into Russian steps through the looking-glass, but that is only from the perspective of the mundane. Pifer says, "Nabokov's account of the artist 'shedding' the age he lives in, like a reptile emerging from a dead skin, does not imply withdrawal from the world but a renewed form of confrontation with it. The artist conceives reality afresh only after he has deliberately separated himself from the apparent world formulated every day by the pressing interests of society" (218).

Joyce undertook this separation voluntarily, for the sake of an unclouded view of his subject, which was Edwardian Dublin, June 16, 1904, frozen in and out of time. Nabokov, on the other hand, experienced involuntary separation from the home country but used his artistic gift to recreate an essential Russia he could carry with him and write about in fiction, memoir and poetry.

Nina Berberova in her autobiography *The Italics are Mine* (1969), interprets the effect of expatriation on Nabokov's writing somewhat differently, but not wholly differently. She speaks with the particular insight of a fellow Russian émigré, novelist, and poet. Her main point is that Nabokov is the only twentieth-century writer of Russian origin who is a world writer belonging to an international group—Joyce, Kafka, Beckett, Ionesco and Borges—which put national origin and mastery of a single national language rife with what she calls "dialectisms" behind it. Nabokov joins this cosmopolitan set by converting what she calls the basic myth of the Expatriate into "a chain of symbols." The links are forged over time but the chain is virtually complete when these lines appear in *The Gift* (1937): "Oh, swear to me to put in dreams your trust / And to believe in fantasy alone." This culminates a series of brief excerpts from early Nabokov texts in which, she suggests, the writer is seen gradually to exchange attachment to familiar home grounds for entry into and growing mastery over a realm of sheer imagination. With the extinction of the hearth fire of nativity the "pale fire" of poetic reflection is enhanced. Somehow this is tantamount to "the catharsis of a whole life."[6]

In a wry conclusion to her pages devoted to Nabokov she hints that his turning away from attachment to birthplace into the void where dream and fantasy flash their lightning also entailed distancing himself from Russian

circles in Western Europe and North America. Quite unlike Joyce, who all during his life entertained visitors from the home island, eagerly questioning them in minute detail about Irish conditions, Nabokov, after a certain point in time, 1937 perhaps, professed indifference to news and rumor from the U.S.S.R. He even began dropping acquaintances among the Russian exiles; people whom he had known for years he looked past in the street. It is a curious development, supposing that Berberova's observations on this painful matter are correct.

Nabokov on *Ulysses*

We know a good deal about what Vladimir Nabokov made of Joyce's masterpiece from two sources not previously introduced in this essay. One is his single lecture on *Ulysses*, reprinted in *Lectures on Literature* (1980), a volume superbly edited by Fredson Bowers. The other is *Lectures on* Ulysses*: A Facsimile of the Manuscript* (1980), produced by photoduplication and issued without editing or even a consecutive numbering of pages. The *Facsimile* is less a text than a mass of handwritten notes, *obiter dicta,* lists, diagrams, and drawings from which he quarried the twelve to fourteen lectures on *Ulysses* he delivered to his Cornell undergraduate students during the final six or seven weeks of each spring semester. The writing throughout is in English and is quite legible even where passages have been crossed off or modified by interlineation. There are four sheets of typed material at the end, to a certain extent recapitulating earlier points but also also adding important new remarks. At the end of the handwritten portion appear details about the final examination. *Ulysses* was the final work assigned in the second semester. The importance he gave it is highlighted in the examination information. There will be one thirty-minute question on Flaubert, another on Kafka, and three questions on *Ulysses* taking ninety minutes. Nabokov gave out reading assignments from class to class. At one point in the *Facsimile* he instructs his students to read through page 251 by the next lecture and at another point reminds them that they should read the novel twice before the course ends. Two readings of *Ulysses* in a space of weeks is a task that even a professional critic might find daunting. The text used was the Random House Modern Library edition, copyright 1934.

The single lecture on *Ulysses* in *Lectures on Literature* seems to have been developed from the much bulkier material in the *Facsimile*. It will be helpful to consider its main points, before focussing on the manuscript material of the *Facsimile*. The very first sentence in the printed lecture mentions Joyce's expatriate status and there is early mention of Joyce getting from *Thom's Dublin Directory* information he did not already hold in memory. That is also how Nabokov launched his first lecture to the undergraduates. A main point about Joyce's three main characters—called a "tryptich" in the *Facsimile*, with central Bloom flanked by Molly and Stephen Dedalus, is that all have an

artistic side. Highbrow Stephen's perfect artistic control over his everyday speech is almost too good, while middlebrow Bloom is more of an artist than critics discern. Finally, lowbrow Molly, "is capable of rich emotional response to the superficially lovely things of life as we shall see in the last part of her extraordinary soliloquy" (*LL* 286–87). This is taken word for word from the opening lecture in the *Facsimile*.

Bloom, however, must be criticized for confusing or bringing too closely together the sexual and excretory functions. His frequent dwelling in thought on physiological aspects is untypical of normal people, indicating a subnormal or pathological strain in his temperament. Some of this is Joyce's fault. Further criticism is levelled at the Homeric homologies and analogies in that they encourage allegorical reading. "All art is in a sense symbolic; but we shall say 'stop, thief' to the critic who deliberately transforms an artist's subtle symbol into a pedant's stale allegory—a thousand and one nights into a convention of Shriners" (*LL* 288). This quip is lifted from the *Facsimile* and was probably read out to the undergraduate audience year after year.

Nabokov next turns his attention to the main theme of *Ulysses*, which is simply "Bloom and Fate." The theme is temporalized under three aspects: 1) the hopeless past, epitomized by the loss of Bloom's little son Rudy, who survived just eleven days; 2) the ridiculous and tragic present, fixed in Molly's betrayal of her husband with Blazes Boylan and in Bloom's knowledge of the betrayal; 3) the pathetic future, represented by Bloom's hope of regaining status in his household, perhaps by introducing Stephen to work on Molly's Italian accent for her singing career or even as her allowed lover.

Transitional to an account of the three main styles of *Ulysses* are statements that each chapter shows a different style predominating and that by changing styles a new standpoint or perspective is generated. This point is given much play in the *Facsimile* where Nabokov, without any reference to Viktor Shklovsky or Russian Formalism, provides his own version of "making strange" when he compares introducing a new perspective through stylistic change to what happens when someone bends down and takes a view of the world through his or her own legs. Another large issue is presented in a sentence: "the whole of *Ulysses,* as we shall gradually realize, is a deliberate pattern of recurrent themes and synchronization of trivial events" (*LL* 289). Three styles of *Ulysses* are then enumerated. The first is "original Joyce: straightforward, lucid and logical and leisurely" (*LL* 289). In the *Facsimile* this style is said to characterize the first two chapter episodes of Part One of *Ulysses*, and to reappear in Bloom's first introduction at the beginning of Part Two. The second style is stream of consciousness, which is said to exaggerate the verbal side of thought. In the *Facsimile* Nabokov argues that we think predominantly in unverbalized images and he questions the verbal richness of middlebrow Bloom's reverie. He also remarks that this Joycean technique falsifies temporality, which is characterized by elasticity, subjective halts, retards and accelerations, whereas the typical stream of consciousness passage

has an even or unvarying tempo. The third style entails parody, not only of non-novelistic forms such as newspaper writing, as in the scene of *Ulysses* set in the offices of the *Telegraph,* but of literary styles, as in the historical sequence of parodies of English prose styles offered in the scene set in the Maternity Hospital (*LL* 289–90).

Nabokov's printed *Ulysses* lecture ends with comments on various telling details. He suggests that the symbol of a "forlorn dog" is attached to Stephen while correspondingly the images of "a soft-bodied cat, a padded-footed pard" are attached to Bloom (*LL* 297). The emphasis on correspondence, called echoing in the *Facsimile*, brings him back to synchronization as a device rather than a theme: "Throughout the book people keep running into each other" (*LL* 316). On the other hand, the unidentified man in the brown mackintosh who keeps turning up, beginning with the graveyard episode, is a theme. He "passes through the dream of the book" and is "no other than the author himself. Bloom glimpses his maker!" (*LL* 320). The words of the single lecture are an echo from the *Facsimile* and the last sentence is word for word. There is no tradition in Joyce scholarship that says the man in the brown mackintosh is James Joyce wearing an absurd disguise. The identification shows Nabokov at his most playful and arbitrary.

There is a lot of the arbitrary in the *Facsimile* considered by itself. *Ulysses*, Nabokov says, is "a splendid and permanent structure," but it is overrated by people who like great literature to incorporate great ideas, generalities, and old myths. Genius is better revealed in management of the details, especially when these are thematized, linked, and laid out in synchronic patterns of echo and correspondence. Thus, early on, Stephen has his encounter with the stray canine on Sandymount strand while Bloom shares his breakfast with the family cat. Both men have problems entailing house keys and both are death haunted, Stephen feeling guilt over his refusal to kneel and pray at his dying mother's bedside and Bloom haunted by recollections of his father's suicide. In such thematic lists Nabokov treats house keys as having the same artistic weight as the death of a parent.

All the more significant then when Nabokov comes up with his own large generalization, saying in the *Facsimile* that "Joyce is not only a humorist, he is a romanticist in the best sense of the word." Nabokov's version of the romantic requires a subject who is not only in quest, but also separated and isolated, and doomed by Fate always to fall short of his goal. That is why *Facsimile* makes Bloom the unitary hero of *Ulysses*, playing down the nearly equal attention the book pays to Stephen Dedalus, who is the central figure of the entire Part One, and who is never absent from the tale's unwinding for very long, even to the final pages of Molly's soliloquy. That is also why Nabokov, rather scandalously, refuses to identify Bloom in his wanderings with the title figure of Ulysses. He goes so far as to omit all mention of the Greek names for Part One (Telemachia) and Part Three (Nostos) and all the traditional eighteen episode titles from Telemachus to Penelope. He even remarked in an interview, "I once

gave a student a C-minus, or perhaps a D-plus, just for applying to its chapters the titles borrowed from Homer" (*SO* 55). For if Bloom were indeed Ulysses the novel could not be a fatal romance, since Ulysses (Odysseus), Homer's hero, eventually comes home to domestic happiness and virtue, resumes his kingship over Ithaca, and, we are led to suppose, lives out a long life as a special favorite of the gods.

None of these "Greek" details touch the Leopold Bloom of Nabokov's conception: "In composing the figure of Bloom, Joyce's intention was to place among endemic [sic] Irishmen in his native Dublin someone who was Irish as he, Joyce, was but who also was in exile, a black sheep in the fold, as he, Joyce, also was. Joyce evolved the rational plan, therefore, of selecting for the type of the outsider the type of wandering Jew, the type of an exile"(*Facsimile*). Nabokov feels that Joyce is sometimes crude in the way "he accumulates and stresses so-called racial traits." But it never occurs to him to mention that the character who gives *Ulysses* its title was also a stranger, wanderer, and exile to the many strands and kingdoms he visited before finally reaching Ithaca. There is a large though presumably unintended irony here. Nabokov is, after all, expounding the work to Cornell undergraduates in Ithaca, N.Y. But Nabokov never seems to see it. That may be because he cannot settle finally for a hero whose destiny, far from being eternal wandering, is to win the greatest prize of all, an arrival safely home.

After preliminary lectures on style, leading themes, the principal characters, special features like synchronization (Stephen and Bloom's crossing each other's wake during the course of the day), and the Dublin background, all of this more fully done than in the single lecture already discussed, Nabokov's six- to seven-week mini-course proceeded episode after episode, "skimming those" that interested him less and delving deep in others. He is at his most acute on the Nighttown episode, exposing its five-part quasi-Shakespearean dramatic structure and bringing imagination to bear on its bizarre "hallucinatory" aspect: "I propose to regard this chapter XII as a *hallucination on the author's part*, an amusing distortion of his various themes. *The book* is itself dreaming and having visions; this chapter is merely an exaggeration, a nightmare evolution of its characters, objects, and themes."

Also in his exposition of XII one discovers Nabokov without compunction enlisting young minds on his side in his long war against Freudian psychoanalysis. After remarking "I do not know of any commentator who has correctly understood this chapter," he goes on: "The psychoanalytical interpretation I, of course, dismiss completely and absolutely since I do not belong to the Freudian denomination with its borrowed myths, shabby umbrella, and dark back stairs." Perhaps we should try some interpretation of our own here. "Borrowed myths" suggests another reason for turning a blind eye to the Homeric side of *Ulysses*; that is, the Freudians, with their recourse to the Oedipus Complex and other classically named psychic dysfunctions, have ruined Greek mythology for those exploring it with other purposes in mind.

The phrase "shabby umbrella" not only brings up the plenitude of phallic objects in naive or stock Freudianism, but also ties the movement to drab middle-class origins. Considering the "dark back stairs" we remember Nabokov castigating Bloom and to some extent Joyce for confusing the sexual functions with certain lower physiological functions in which the sphincter muscle plays the main part. One begins to suspect that the root of Nabokov's quarrel with Freud is connected to the latter's account of infantile psychosexual development, where anality is a middle stage between the new infant's oral fixation on the maternal breast at the beginning of life and a third stage in which the individual, usually, progresses to the phallic-genital stage of object attachment.

Nabokov also does particularly well by Episode X, the beach episode, drawing out the poetry in Bloom's swooning, masturbatory reverie ("for reasons of time and coeducation I cannot share with you all the plums in this wonderful chapter") and his afterthoughts as summer twilight descends and the bats emerge from a church tower nearby. He also approaches with subtle sympathy the plight of Gerty Macdowell, the lame girl whose imaginings are shaped by the cliches and trite metaphors of magazine romance fiction. Just as Humbert Humbert's characterization owes more than a little to Joyce's Leopold Bloom, so does the characterization of Dolores Haze owe something to Joyce's Gerty.

He does not give much space to the long and elaborate Episode XI, set at the Maternity Hospital, but shows strong insight into its final pages where action late at night has moved to Burke's public house: "The hullabaloo at the bar is rendered on pages 417–420, where I find reflected the grotesque, inflated, broken miming and punning style of the author's next and last novel, *Finnegans Wake*."

As for the unpunctuated Molly Bloom soliloquy of forty-five pages with which *Ulysses* comes to a close, his tip on how to read it is both iconoclastic and shrewd: "Take a sharp pencil and separate the sentences." One last time he expresses his doubt about the technique called stream of consciousness for "its blurring of the time element." He also says that there is "too great a reliance on typography," adding, as if in afterthought, "These Joycean pages have had great influence. In this typographical broth many a minor poet has been generated. The typesetter of the great James Joyce is the godfather of tiny Mr. Cummings. You should not see in the stream of consciousness as rendered by Joyce a natural event. It is a reality only insofar as it reflects Joyce's cerebration, the mind of the book. This book is a new world invented by Joyce. . . ."

Nabokov's view that a great book is a world by itself, and that a great novelist, any kind of great artist, is one of a kind, an entire species unto himself—herself in the case of Jane Austen, whose *Mansfield Park* was included in the first semester of his Cornell course—was a conviction from which he never deviated. Whether James Joyce thought the same is a speculation, but the immense deliberation with which he spaced the compo-

sition and publication of his three novels and the long years he spent slowly accreting and shaping both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* on entirely new lines of fictional form suggest that he did. Perhaps that is the strongest link between the two writers, a shared ambition to face down the many horrors of the twentieth century by creating new worlds of fiction and a certain sharing of accomplishment in moving towards that goal.

A final point. Like most sets of notes for academic courses, especially lively ones, the *Lectures on* Ulysses*: a Facsimile* is completely incoherent as a text. That is probably one reason why it was issued in photoduplicated format. Any editing of the material would have meant fabricating a book, a counterfeit one, and attributing it to a great writer no longer living and able to defend himself. There is something appropriate in its publication in 1980, just as the era of Deconstruction really got going in the Anglo-American academic world. What is appropriate is that without Joyce, especially without the final pages of the hospital chapter in *Ulysses* and all of *Finnegans Wake,* there never would have been a movement called Deconstruction, which argues illogically that all texts, including its own governing assumptions, are incoherent at bottom (since language does not know whereof it speaks), and which, at least in the Deconstructive school of Derrida, shows a tedious addiction to the later Joycean portmanteau pun. Literature gets the criticism and critical theory it elicits and deserves. In these areas, Nabokov's view and probably Joyce's too, is that creative artists, with an assist from McFate, a.k.a. Mackintosh, call the tune.

Julian Moynahan

NOTES

1. Quoted in Bloom, *Vladimir Nabokov's* Lolita, p. 90.
2. See Simon Karlinsky's "Nabokov's Russian Games," pp. 86–92.
3. Bloom, *Vladimir Nabokov's* Lolita, 69–81.
4. *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing,* 3: 5.
5. In Roth, 1984, pp. 215–21. Subsequent page references to Pifer are given in the text.
6. Berberova, 1969, p. 321.

NABOKOV AND KAFKA

Though Nabokov called "The Metamorphosis" a modern masterpiece, ranking it just below *Ulysses* (*SO* 57), much about his relationship to Kafka remains obscure. He never explains why he prefers this story over Kafka's equally famous novels, *The Trial* and *The Castle*, although a key factor was probably their author's inability to finish them, so that they were published only after his death.[1] Nabokov even leaves it uncertain when he first encountered Kafka,

who influenced so many other major twentieth-century writers, from Sartre, Camus, and Borges in the 1930s to Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, and Ionesco after World World War II.[2]

In a particularly detailed statement, Nabokov insisted that although he began living in Berlin in 1922, his ignorance of German was so great that he "could not read Kafka before the nineteen thirties when his *La métamorphose* appeared in *La nouvelle revue française*" (*SO* 151). In general, discussions of Nabokov's affinities with Kafka have centered on this decade. G.M. Hyde has identified possible links as early as *The Eye* (1930) and *Despair* (written in 1933),[3] but *Invitation to a Beheading* (written in 1934) has received fuller treatment, due to motifs which recall Kafka's novels, such as heroes with initialed names who are tried for mysterious crimes by all-powerful courts.[4] Indeed, despite the author's disavowal of any debts to Kafka in his 1959 foreword to *Invitation* (p. 6),[5] he then undermines that claim in his last novel *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974). As the protagonist Vadim pursues a career that is loosely patterned on Nabokov's own, he writes a novel called *The Red Topper* which roughly corresponds to *Invitation* and which Vadim identifies with "the pangs of a strange transformation" (120). This change may differ from waking up "one Central European morning as a great scarab with more legs than any beetle can have," yet Vadim still admits to "certain excruciating tearings of secret tissues." Nabokov thus keeps his distance from the fantastic opening of "The Metamorphosis," but at the same time teases the reader with the possibility of some less direct link between Gregor Samsa's new shape and this dynamic period in his career. By an ingenious irony, in fact, the very indirectness of Kafka's role suggests a relationship that is "metamorphic" in its own right.

For all this emphasis on the 1930s, however, the French translation of "The Metamorphosis" which Nabokov mentions actually came out in 1928.[6] As for his knowledge of German, moreover, he once told a German interviewer that he had known the language well enough to translate Heine as a youth (*SO* 189). In that case Nabokov could certainly have tackled Kafka in the original, for his syntax and vocabulary probably make him the easiest major German writer to read, if not to interpret. Nor would Nabokov have had to venture past the first paragraph to find the passage so vividly evoked in *The Red Topper*. Could his conviction that he once saw Kafka on a Berlin streetcar in 1923,[7] a chance meeting which his biographer rejects as impossible,[8] actually mask some very early, unavowed and fleeting, yet still decisive contact with his writings?

On the other hand, when Nabokov once summarized the entire period from 1919 to 1939, he did not even name Kafka among his "top favorites" as a reader (*SO* 43). Only in *Bend Sinister* (1947), which refers in passing to a beetle-shaped bootjack nicknamed Grégoire (33–34), does he unequivocally allude to reading "The Metamorphosis" in French translation. This odd image, in turn, relates back to a similar bootjack in Nabokov's last Russian

novel, the unfinished *Solus Rex* project of 1939–40. Though not named after Gregor Samsa, this implement is said to lurk "under the border of an armchair robed in a white furniture cover,"[9] a description which clearly recalls the pathetic efforts of Kafka's transformed hero not to offend his family. But even this reference appears on the threshold of the 1940s, so that this decade is also a plausible contender for Nabokov's first contact with "The Metamorphosis."

Still, despite these uncertainties about Kafka's early impact on Nabokov, it is reasonably clear why he chose "The Metamorphosis" as one of only four modern classics alongside novels by Joyce, Bely, and Proust. Although in the 1950s Nabokov would begin his lectures on the story by insisting that it was "more than an entomological fantasy" (*LL* 251), both terms actually help crystallize his response to the work. With regard to entomology, students remember his painstaking efforts both to draw Gregor's new shape and to classify the kind of insect he became. This synthesis of graphic art and taxonomic science not only recalls the minute visual details which fueled Nabokov's entomological research in the 1940s, but looks ahead to his unfinished project on the butterfly in European painting.[10] Meanwhile, the stress on fantasy evokes Kafka's special relevance for Nabokov's efforts to downplay narrowly mimetic fiction. In the following polemic with novelistic realism, it is Kafka who clinches a point that would otherwise be more debatable: "It is pure fantasy on Proust's part, just as *Anna Karenin* is a fantasy, just as Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis' is fantasy" (*LL* 210). But Kafka's importance to Nabokov as the exemplary anti-realist should not be exaggerated. After all, his impact largely parallels that of Lewis Carroll, whose importance at the outset of Nabokov's career is much more clearly documented, beginning with his Russian translation of *Alice in Wonderland* in 1923. It is therefore telling that although Elizabeth Boegeman isolate various Kafkaesque motifs in *Invitation to a Beheading*, she must concede that the ending echoes Carroll (p. 109).

One should also ask, given Nabokov's conviction that Russian, French, and English were the three great literary languages, why a German writer like Kafka even appears among his modern prose classics. As a matter of fact, in a fictitious vignette of Russian émigré literature around 1930, he had limited the modern European canon to Proust and Joyce (*Glory* 140–42). A decade later he places both *Ulysses* and a volume of Proust in Sebastian Knight's London library; Chekhov rather than Bely is the featured Russian, but there are still no Germans (*RLSK* 39). Only after Nabokov came to the United States, apparently, did he confront the German contribution to modern fiction. Thomas Mann, a fellow exile from Hitler's Europe, was then at the height of his American reputation; and by 1945 Nabokov could complain about his vogue as a modern novelist to the influential critic Edmund Wilson: "How *could* you name that quack Mann in one breath with P. and J.?" (*NWL* 148). Kafka, it may be gathered, was chosen to take Mann's place as the German writer who deserved equal billing with Proust and Joyce.

This dichotomy survives in Nabokov's list of four modern masterpieces, where the build-up includes an attack on "Mann's asinine *Death in Venice*" (*SO* 57). From Nabokov's point of view, this story may well have seemed a negative counterpart to "The Metamorphosis." Instead of Kafka's breakthrough into the fantastic, *Death in Venice* pioneered the modernist method of interweaving contemporary life with antique myth, a method later extended in Mann's Joseph novels and *Doctor Faustus* (see von Gronicka and Traschen). But for Nabokov, the mythical approach was detestable wherever he found it in modern culture—in Freud, Eliot, and even Joyce as well as Mann.[11] This attitude even colors his attacks on *poshlost'*, or cultural mediocrity, which culminate in the 1960s with *Death in Venice* as a prime example (*SO* 101), but which began in the 1940s when Nabokov cited Gogol's story of a German so enamored with the "poetically antique and mythological" that he courted his wife by swimming sportively between two swans (*NG* 65–66).

Kafka, to be sure, was hardly immune to mythical readings. Thus Edwin Muir, who translated Kafka into English with his wife, had proclaimed that his work was the very essence of the archetypical.[12] But Nabokov vigorously dismissed this trend. In his lectures he told students that Kafka thought psychoanalysis "a hopeless error" (*LL* 256), or that Paul Goodman's blend of totemism and depth psychology in interpreting Gregor's transformation was "drivel."[13] Nabokov's own "demythified" approach focused on structural issues, specifically on marking the story's segmentation into twenty-six separate scenes. In addition, though often accused of coldness toward his own characters, he expressed strong sympathy for Gregor's plight (*LL* 261, 270), and cunningly pointed out subtle insect-like changes in the Samsa family that revealed their moral degradation (275, 281). Above all, he praised the artistic tact of Kafka's precise, matter-of-fact style which, by contrasting so sharply with Gregor's incredible new shape, brilliantly intensified the story's nightmarish effect (283).

This emphasis on style points up another key factor in Nabokov's admiration for "The Metamorphosis"—Kafka's identification with Flaubert as a "spiritual son . . . albeit a weak and clumsy one."[14] Nabokov felt a similar filial link, which went well beyond the "weakness for Flaubert" (341) of his hero Fyodor in *The Gift*. Thus in the final version of his autobiography *Speak, Memory* (174), Nabokov mentions his father's copy of *Madame Bovary*, which was returned to the family as a memento after his assassination in 1922, with the inscription "the unsurpassed pearl of French literature" on the flyleaf. Looking back after five decades as a writer, the son continues to endorse the elder Nabokov's comment: "a judgment that still holds." Small wonder that *Lectures on Literature* can assert not just that "the greatest literary influence upon Kafka was Flaubert's" (256), but that "without Flaubert there would have been no Marcel Proust in France, no James Joyce in Ireland" (147). To support this claim, Nabokov mentions larger formal issues like the handling of transitions and the use of internal echoes, but he also stresses Flaubert's "inner

force of style" (147). Kafka thus joins the initial canon of Joyce and Proust to form an international group of otherwise independent writers, writers who were subtle stylists like Nabokov and who shared his veneration for Flaubert as the best nineteenth-century model for modern fiction.

In weighing Kafka's impact on Nabokov's own work, critics should heed the playful indirectness with which *Look at the Harlequins!* treats *The Red Topper*. Discussion of links and affinities between the two writers has been bedevilled by overly narrow conceptions of influence. So long as the basic approach posits a later writer who deliberately imitates an earlier one, it will falsify Nabokov's dominant attitude, which aimed at creative distortion or even at a reversal of his predecessors. Not for nothing was this chess-player fascinated by the knight, with its non-linear, continuously twisting motion across the board.[15] Even when he describes his first poem in *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov assumes that the creative process involves a reshuffling of the author's literary contexts. If his readings are a fence with a circus painted on it, the poem rearranges these elements to create a new fence showing "disjointed parts of animals (some of them, moreover, upside down)—a tawny haunch, a zebra's head, the leg of an elephant" (221). At its most interesting and powerful, literary influence means creative transformation, thereby explaining Nabokov's attacks on reviewers who discuss his books by "scurrying in search of more or less celebrated names for the purpose of passionate comparison" (*IB* 6). The real issue is not whether he resembles Kafka, but where and in what ways he goes beyond him.

It is this differential approach that inspires Nabokov's single most important comment on "The Metamorphosis" (*LL* 259): "Curiously enough, Gregor the beetle never found out that he had wings under the hard covering of his back. (This is a very nice observation on my part to be treasured all your lives.)" On repeating the point in *Strong Opinions* (90–91), Nabokov adds that Kafka shared his character's ignorance and that Gregor "could have flown out and escaped." Through this entomological detail Nabokov highlights the main temperamental contrast between himself and Kafka. Nabokovian self-confidence and even gusto impel him to cut the Gordian knot of inextricable double-binds, to discover unexpected exits from tragedy, and to rejoice in metamorphosis as a natural phenomenon promising growth and even ecstasy. Though here is not the place to pursue this issue in detail, several key moments in the earlier work may be isolated as steps leading to Nabokov's decision to teach "The Metamorphosis" in the 1950s.

Whether or not Nabokov knew Kafka in the 1920s, his characteristic buoyancy surfaces as early as the 1924 story "Christmas." Written soon after the elder Nabokov's untimely death, this work sets out from a scene of irremediable grief that anticipates both *Solus Rex* and *Bend Sinister*. But instead of husbands who have lost their wives, the story begins with a father who has lost his son in pre-revolutionary Russia; after the funeral he returns to his country house which has been closed for the winter, takes some

mementos of his son from the icy study, and goes to his heated bedroom. In anguish he contemplates suicide when a cocoon from the boy's insect collection bursts open. A splendid moth emerges in response to the warmth, and despite the winter outside it spreads its wings, revelling in what the story's last words call "the impulse of tender, ravishing, almost human happiness."[16] The reversal of "The Metamorphosis," which closes with Gregor's pitiless sister as she "stretched her young body" in what Nabokov considered an insect's response to the spring (*LL* 281–282), is striking, if perhaps a bit simplistic. Bodily transformation means development rather than regression, human possibility replaces animalistic limitation, the wonder of new life overcomes bitter irony. Even if this story about metamorphosis is not a direct polemic with Kafka, it already embodies attitudes which account for Nabokov's later proposal of a happy ending for Gregor's plight.

In "The Aurelian," originally a Russian story of 1930 (not 1931 as Nabokov dates it), then translated in 1941 as one of his first American publications, the metamorphosis motif becomes more complex. Simple reversal of a tragic impasse yields to uneasy ambivalence, and this ambivalence signals the possibility of greater openness to Kafka. For although a mixed attitude is still a long way from unqualified endorsement, it does provide a possible basis for long-term impact, even if first contact came after 1930.

"The Aurelian" focuses on a Berlin butterfly dealer who has fallen on hard times and has perhaps become unbalanced after a recent stroke. He seizes the chance for a long-delayed collecting trip abroad; but after raising money by questionable means and writing a curt farewell to his wife, he collapses and dies before leaving his shop. The two-pronged last paragraph vividly evokes the entomologist's dreams of travel and then describes the scene of his death, but only after commenting that "in a certain sense, it is quite irrelevant."[17] At least in imagination the butterfly dealer has emulated his stock in trade, and the narrator's rhetoric encourages readers to share in a marvellous transformation. Yet its basis is morally dubious, all the more because Nabokov has deftly recalled German history from World War I through the inflation to the depression.[18] As a result, the protagonist's flight from central European entrapment teeters uneasily between liberation and sinister delusion. Indeed, except for the enigmatic aside which reduces the man's death to irrelevance "in a certain sense," delusion arguably does prevail; and this metamorphosis begins to feel like a Kafkaesque double-bind. A Berlin butterfly dealer reduced to selling school supplies does not seem that far from an overworked traveling salesman in Prague, as Gregor had been before his transformation.

The last pages of *Bend Sinister*, however, swerve away from the Kafkaesque even as they find an exit from the European nightmare of the 1930s. Until this ending, the beetle-like bootjack mentioned above points up the parallels between Gregor's regressive metamorphosis, which unleashes the pitilessness of his family, and the regressive revolution of the novel's "Communazi" police state, which terrorizes the hero Adam Krug. But then the novel abruptly shifts

from Krug's fate to show the author in the "comparative paradise" of his study (241). His final words, "a good night for mothing," subtly correlate the interruption of Krug's Kafka-like story with a renewed awareness for another, life-enlarging kind of metamorphosis. Later, when Nabokov added an introduction (1963), he would reveal that this moth actually represents the soul of Krug's dead wife Olga (xix). He thus gives the theme of transformation a more pointedly spiritual emphasis.

Yet just a couple years after *Bend Sinister*, in the butterfly chapter of *Speak, Memory* (first published in 1948), one problematic image suggests the lingering pull of Kafka's deeply unsettling vision, or at least of that side of Nabokov's sensibility which responded to Kafka. Most of the chapter works to create a mood of euphoric metamorphosis, as the entomological dreams of Nabokov's Russian boyhood find glorious fulfillment in America. But his proud memory of catching his first moth, using ether to kill it, and placing it in his collection disintegrates when he remembers an operation in which he was himself given ether. For when he mentions how "my own vitals were being exposed" (121), the ironic parallel between himself under the scalpel and the moth transfixed by pins identifies him with the creatures he pursued. As in *Lolita*, where Quilty's play *The Enchanted Hunters* can become *The Hunted Enchanters* (196), a larger reference frame opens up where the hunter might be the prey. For an instant one of Nabokov's most buoyant pieces of writing has self-deflated: even as it implies a deeply problematic role reversal, it questions the very origins of his entomological passion. It is the persistence of this corrosive counter-vision that, despite Nabokov's prevailing enthusiasm for the results of metamorphic change, helps keep him attuned to Kafka.

A much broader issue that demands further research would move beyond the differential maneuverings just outlined to ask whether Nabokov, despite his lucidity and self-consciousness, might have learned more from Kafka than he knew. For example, if Kafka did leave a mark on *The Eye*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, *Solus Rex*, and *Bend Sinister*, what happens to that response in *Pale Fire*, *Ada*, and *Transparent Things*, which D. Barton Johnson has argued are the real flowering of those earlier works?[19] In particular, Kafka's relation to the fusion of fantasy and metaphysical interest in all these works needs to be clarified. Or, since many writers "after Kafka" are seminal postmodernists, what is the connection between the putative postmodernism of Nabokov's later fiction and that fiction's as yet unestablished debt to Kafka? For Boegeman, Nabokov's "strange transformation" at the time of *Invitation to a Beheading* heralds his impending switch to English (pp. 116–19), but in a cultural-historical context it could refer to his dawning awareness of this new literary paradigm. Each of these questions may in fact be blind alleys, but only a clearer understanding of postmodernism and of both Kafka's and Nabokov's places in Western culture after 1960 will make it possible to decide.

John Burt Foster, Jr.

NOTES

1. Nabokov had a similar criterion for including only the first half of Proust's *À la Recherche du temps perdu* on the same list of masterpieces. As he explained, Proust died before he could finish correcting the last half of the novel. See "Nabokov and Proust" in this volume.
2. See Sandbank, who does not, however, mention Nabokov among Kafka's literary heirs.
3. Hyde, pp. 104, 109.
4. See Boegeman, pp. 109–111.
5. In this foreword Nabokov again states that he knew no German and that he used English as well as French translations in reading Kafka. Then, in a rare comment on Kafka's two main novels, he goes on to deny any links between "*Le chateau* or *The Trial*" and *Invitation*. But this snappy assertion actually says very little. For Nabokov could not have read *either* title in 1934: the French translation he names only appeared in 1938, and the English one in 1937. To be meaningful, the denial would have had to specify *The Castle* and *Le Procès*, which had been published in 1930 and 1933. Is Nabokov enjoying a harmless mystification, or has he coyly revealed one true path of influence? For Kafka's translation into English, see Sandbank, p. 113; for the French translations, see Goth, pp. 258, 259.
6. Boegeman, pp. 117, 120 n. 7. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.
7. Appel, 1979, pp. 19–20.
8. Boyd, 1990, p. 202.
9. In *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*, p. 189. Since the same detail appears in the 1940 Russian version of "Solus Rex" (p. 8), Nabokov could not have added it at the time of translation.
10. Boyd, 1991, pp. 58–59, 67–68, 481.
11. The diatribes against Freud are legion; see *SO* 66, for a typical passage on the psychoanalytic abuse of myth ("a daily application of old Greek myths to their private parts"). For Nabokov's critique of Eliot's and Joyce's "mythical method," see John Foster, 1991, p. 57. Traschen (pp. 87–88) discusses the link between Mann and both Eliot and Joyce.
12. Sandbank, pp. 113–114.
13. Boyd, 1991, p. 196.
14. Bernheimer, p. x.
15. In *The Gift* Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev baldly states that "any genuinely new trend is a knight's move" (239). The artist–hero's name in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* not only recalls the chess piece on several occasions (he loves both Nina Toorovetz, whose name suggests the Russian word for "rook," and Clare Bishop) but also inspires the phrase "that special 'Knightian twist'" (156).
16. In *Details of a Sunset and Other Stories*, p. 161.
17. In *Nabokov's Dozen*, pp. 110–11.
18. Ibid., p. 102.
19. *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 216–18.

NABOKOV AND KHODASEVICH

The subtle, sustaining kinship between Vladislav Khodasevich (1886–1939) and Vladimir Nabokov is one of the great stories of Russian émigré literature of the interwar period.[1] Despite numerous references to it by commentators, it has yet to be told in anything like its full dimensionality. The core of the relationship can be summed up as follows: Khodasevich, one of the outstanding poets of the emigration, "wrote himself out" creatively ("ispisalsia") in the late 1920s and 1930s at precisely the moment when the young poet-become-prose writer V. Sirin burst on the scene with his stories and novels, including his first major success, *Zashchita Luzhina* (*The Defense*, 1930).[2] Both of these men shared certain tastes and values and, as time went on, both grew increasingly aware that Khodasevich represented the past glories of Russian poetry, legitimate as an object of study but impossible to sustain in the linguistic bell jar of the emigration, and that Sirin (as Nabokov the writer was referred to throughout his émigré years) represented Russian literature's best chance for a future worthy of its past.

Khodasevich, ever exacting in his judgments, had come to the conclusion that his gift was doomed on foreign soil: what had made it genuine in Russia—"everyone was listening to my verse,"[3] as his persona asserts in the retrospective poem "Petersburg" (1926)—made it parochial and "unnecessary," especially amid the growing vulgarity and cultural leveling, in Paris. But while Sirin could summon his childhood Russia with the almost prehensile memory and visual acuity of a Bunin, and therefore could easily have yielded to the same cultural abulia and impotent nostalgia for *temps perdu* that afflicted virtually every émigré enclave, he did not. For, as Khodasevich understood perhaps better than anyone, this trilingual young writer was many things, but what he was not was parochial and verbally listless. It was this "passing of the torch" of Russian culture, acted out at the level of personal destiny but at another remove supremely disinterested and, one wants to say, noble, that lay at the heart of the Khodasevich–Sirin kinship. In what follows I propose to examine different facets of that kinship, focusing on the biographical context but also mentioning along the way such issues as the Symbolist legacy, the return to Pushkin, the appeal of the literary hoax, and the famous Fyodor-Koncheyev colloquies in *The Gift* (1952).

First some background on Vladislav Khodasevich. By the time he was forced into exile in June 1922, the Moscow-born Khodasevich was already an important poet and literary figure. He had written four books of verse, two of which—*Putem zerna* (*Grain's Way,* 1920) and *Tiazhelaia lira* (*The Heavy Lyre,* 1922)—were indisputably major. Indeed, with its startling fusion of Symbolism and post-Symbolism, Pushkinian lapidary simplicity, and ever-questioning irony, *The Heavy Lyre* would go down as one of the truly great books in the modern Russian tradition. Khodasevich's prosodic conservatism (e.g., his use of the iamb as a kind of classical amphora for the storage of semantic vitriol),

his ties to the city of St. Petersburg (*The Heavy Lyre* was written for the most part in that city and can be viewed as a post-Revolutionary swansong to it), his belief in a fiercely private "other world" of the spirit, his willingness to weigh his own words "on Pushkin's scales," his impeccable taste and stern standards in matters of artistic conscience were all qualities that, *mutatis mutandis,* Sirin would make his own. In the years prior to exile Khodasevich had also established himself as a leading critic, translator (especially of the Polish classics and modern Hebrew poets), literary historian, and Pushkinist. Andrei Bely had helped to make his reputation with important articles on the poet in 1922 and 1923. Other accolades, from sources as varied as Maksim Gorky, Osip Mandelshtam, Vladimir Weidlé, Gleb Struve, Konstantin Mochulsky, Iuly Aikhenval'd, Alfred Bem, and Sirin himself, would follow.

In 1927 Khodasevich published his *Sobranie stikhov* (*Collected Verse*), the third part of which constituted a "new book"[4] entitled *Evropeiskaia noch'* (*European Night*). Sirin joined the discussion of the volume in the émigré press by writing an enthusiastic review in the pages of the Berlin-based *Rul'* (*The Rudder*). He was clearly drawn to what he wryly termed the "optico-pharmaco-chemico-anatomical coating" ("optichesko-aptekarsko-khimichesko-anatomicheskii nalet") of Khodasevich's imagery that in some ways would become the trademark of his own synaesthetically—but primarily *visually*—arresting prose.[5] In an émigré literary culture that was coming to place increasing emphasis on unmediated "feelings" at the expense of "insincere" artistic form and craftsmanship, Sirin praised Khodasevich's restraint, his unwillingness to use cheap tricks to win the reader's sympathy, and his noble urge to "sing the unsingable." According to Sirin, who would remain the strictest of critics his entire life, "Khodasevich is a huge poet ['ogromnyi poet'], but not, I think, a poet for everyone. The person looking for verse-induced repose and lunar landscapes will be repelled. But for those who can take pleasure in a poet without fumbling about in his 'worldview' or demanding a response, Khodasevich's collected poems are an enchanting work of art."[6]

It could be argued that some of Khodasevich's lessons did not go unattended by Sirin. The older poet's uncanny ability to project the essence of "prose in verse"[7] and his absolutely "shameless freedom" in the selection of theme, coupled with a strong sense of proportion and the limits of genre, must have made a powerful impact on the young Sirin. We find, for example, a striking poem ("Pod zemlei" ["Underground," 1923]) in *European Night* in which a distinguished looking old tramp is caught in the act of masturbating in a foul Berlin stairwell; Khodasevich's speaker is brought to an eloquent rage by this vision of what should, in principle, be a creative act.[8] Sirin creates a similar situation in "Lilit" ("Lilith," 1928): here the speaker, murdered the day before, imagines he has gone to paradise because he is lured to a vividly sensual rendezvous by a beautiful maiden emerging, Botticelli-like, out of the water.[9] But the heavenly intercourse turns into hellish frustration when the girl withdraws herself *in medias res,* and the speaker, now beside himself and

nearing the moment of orgasm, is forced out on the street to spill his seed—and his shame—before the leering mob. Both the Sirin poem and the Khodasevich poem on which it is modeled tap the feelings of potential creative impotence their authors experience as Russian poets who must spill their verbal seeds on alien pavement.[10] The Sirin poem has the added dimension of revealing one of its creator's greatest fears: that of "losing control" (of his feelings, of his words) and, naked and defenseless, of being subjected to the stares and jeers of the hoi polloi.[11]

In the 1930s, at the time when he was writing often about Sirin's new fiction, Khodasevich wrote two other major works, both "retrospective" and in prose: the "artistic" (in the sense of subtly stylized) biography of the poet–statesman Derzhavin (*Derzhavin,* 1931) and a remarkably terse and psychologically penetrating collection of memoirs about friends and colleagues of the Symbolist years called *Nekropol'* (*Necropolis,* 1939). While not representative of Khodasevich the poet, these works are now considered leading exemplars of interwar émigré letters. What is interesting in the context of Sirin's development as a novelist is Khodasevich's unique talent (at base creative) for taking the historical scholarship of Ia. K. Grot and "embalming" it with consummate stylized life, so that Derzhavin and his epoch come alive in a strangely compelling manner. One suspects that Khodasevich's work on Derzhavin may have influenced in two ways Sirin's experiment with the genre of biography (the life of Chernyshevsky) in *The Gift:* first, it pointed the way to the always unpredictable adventures of research and the almost tactile pleasure of working with primary materials; second, it provided a model for a work on a major figure from the past (Derzhavin, of course, being as "constructive" as Chernyshevsky was "destructive" and potentially parodic) whose impact on Russian literary history could be felt in the present. In addition to chronicling the state of contemporary émigré and Soviet literature, Khodasevich spent considerable time in his last years on issues of Pushkin studies, writing numerous separate articles and essays, reworking and expanding the poorly edited *Poeticheskoe khoziaistvo Pushkina* (*Pushkin's Poetic Economy,* 1924) into *O Pushkine* (*On Pushkin,* 1937), and, finally, beginning—but never completing—a biography of the poet. Perhaps the single greatest bond in the Khodasevich–Sirin relationship was their mutual response, in matters of artistic taste and temperament, to Pushkin's inimitable "tuning fork," as the narrator describes it in *The Gift:* that this major Silver Age poet could invest and reinvest so much scholarly capital in order to maintain "the gold reserve of our literature" (*Gift* 96, 72) made perfect sense to the future commentator on *Eugene Onegin.*[12]

Thus the man who became Sirin's shrewdest critic in the emigration and the one probably most responsible for establishing his reputation could be characterized, circa 1930, by the following: a frail, yet elegantly elongated, somewhat "serpentine" physique,[13] diamond-hard honesty, a "bilious" ("zhelchnyi") temperament, double-edged wit, and now, lately, a sense of deep

frustration bordering on quiet rage owing to the increasingly rare visits of his *psikheia* (Psyche, Muse). This is how the poet describes himself in his famous poem "Pered zerkalom" ("Before the Mirror," 1924): "I, I, I. What a savage word is this! / Is it true that the one over there is I? / How could Mama have loved this person, / ashen-yellow in tint, half-grizzled / and, like a snake, all-knowing?"[14] And this is how Nabokov himself recalls his friend in *Speak, Memory*: "I developed a great liking for this bitter man, wrought of irony and metallic-like genius, whose poetry was as complex a marvel as that of Tyutchev or Blok. He was, physically, of a sickly aspect, with contemptuous nostrils and beetling brows, and when I conjure him up in mind he never rises from the hard chair on which he sits, his thin legs crossed, his eyes glittering with malevolence and wit, his long fingers screwing into a holder the half of a *Caporal Vert* cigarette" (*SM* 285).

Following various peregrinations, Paris had become, by mid-1925, Khodasevich's permanent base of operations in exile. His important relationships with Andrei Bely and Maksim Gorky (and their ties with Russia) were now behind him, and the "European night" of Russian culture was, he divined, fast approaching. Together with Nina Berberova, the young writer with whom he had left Russia, he took up residence in a series of unsavory hotels and apartment houses. The couple had an exceedingly difficult time scratching out an existence on the margins of French society. It was at approximately this time that Khodasevich suffered from bouts of insomnia and the reappearance of furunculosis, a painful and messy disease that had tormented him in Russia. His position was made even more desperate when he crossed swords with Pavel Miliukov, the powerful editor of *Poslednie novosti* (*The Latest News*), the leading Russian-language daily in Paris. Miliukov bluntly told the tetchy poet–critic that the newspaper "did not need him at all."[15] But Khodasevich's mood improved somewhat when, in 1927, he found a relatively secure position as head of the literary section at *Vozrozhdenie* (*The Renaissance*) and was able, in the same year, to publish his *Collected Verse.*

We find the first mention in print of Sirin's fiction by Khodasevich shortly after the latter's appointment to *The Renaissance*: in one of what were to be regular surveys of émigré literature, he pointed out, en passant, that the novel *Korol', dama, valet* (*King, Queen, Knave*, 1928) is "without doubt talented, contemporary in theme, and interesting in execution."[16] A much more substantial review of *The Defense* followed on 11 October 1930. This piece was more representative in that it afforded Khodasevich ample space to analyze the hauntingly "constructed" quality of the young author's artistic world and to begin to enunciate the strategies through which that world might be approached and understood. Khodasevich, it turned out, was encouraged (one can hear the slight rise in his journalistic voice) by the fresh and uncompromising gift revealed in *The Defense* in the same way that Sirin, in his review of Khodasevich's *Collected Verse*, had taken comfort from a poet who remained true to the harsh genius of his vision and made no concessions for the

sentimental or philistine reader: "More now than in former times, people who look for amusement and idle relaxation in literature have appeared in large numbers: this is a sign of a culture that is either undeveloped or in decline. In Sirin's novel . . . such people will find little for themselves. But artistically cultivated minds will glean, in this darkly plotted book, pure joy and intelligent comfort: genuine art is always comforting, no matter how its author looks at the world and no matter what fate awaits its heroes."[17]

With impressive powers of induction and imaginative empathy, Khodasevich already perceived that Sirin's fiction was, despite its strange heroes and ingenious plots, about the sensibility of the artist and the nature of the artistic process. Sirin was the master of "meta-" (what would become a truism of later Nabokov criticism), but it was a "meta-" with a distinctly Symbolist slant. It was never, as Khodasevich understood implicitly, pure solipsistic play or art for art's sake. Was the tragicomic chess master Luzhin a true genius or simply a great talent, was he, to speak in Pushkinian terms, a Mozart or a Salieri? Khodasevich concluded that "Luzhin is not a genius" but that his madness is a sign of something higher and in this regard he deserves "the honor of being called a sacrificial victim ['zhertva'] of art." Importantly, Khodasevich also identified the "this-worldly"/"other-worldly" seam separating Symbolist and Acmeist[18] aesthetics—a seam that had been crucial for his own development away from Briusov, Blok, and Bely and that would be crucial for Sirin as well: "The artist is doomed to a sojourn in two worlds: the real world and the world of art created by him. A genuine master always finds himself situated on that line belonging to both worlds where the planes of each intersect. The separation from reality, the total immersion in a world of art where there is no flight but only an endless fall is madness. It threatens the honest dilettante but not the master possessing the gift of finding and thereafter never losing the line of intersection. Genius is measure, harmony, eternal equilibrium."[19]

This sense of genius as the "measure, harmony, [and] eternal equilibrium" enabling a genuine artist *to keep his balance* between two worlds is the quality Khodasevich most cultivated in his own art and now saw in Sirin. Needless to say, its origins lay not in the Dionysian self-immolation of the Symbolists but in the Apollonian clarity and control of Pushkin, who always "held something back." It is interesting to speculate at this point that the death of a close friend or loved one was instrumental in turning both Khodasevich and Nabokov away from the excesses of Symbolism toward Pushkinian "sobriety": Khodasevich had lost his best friend "Muni" (Samuil Kissin) to suicide in 1916 and Nabokov was deeply traumatized by the murder of his father during an assassination attempt on Pavel Miliukov in 1922. That Muni, whose death was yet another example of the too-close links between life and art in the Symbolist epoch, seemed capable of projecting, from his otherworldly vantage, a "fatidic" presence in the thoughts and activities of his friend suggests

the role in Nabokov's art—especially *The Gift*—of the writer's father, who was killed in a senseless act of political terrorism and whose wife and son were reading Blok's poetry on the night of his death.[20] In a very personal way, Pushkin turns out to have been for both Khodasevich and Nabokov a necessary antidote to the dangerous intoxication of Symbolist myth-making.

Throughout the thirties Khodasevich wrote more about Sirin than about any other contemporary writer. He penned a separate *feuilleton*-length essay on *Camera Obscura* (1933), devoted another piece to *Otchaianie* (*Despair*, 1936), followed closely the serialization in *Sovremennye zapiski* (*Contemporary Annals*) of *Priglashenie na kazn'* (*Invitation to a Beheading*, 1938) and *The Gift*, and reported his impressions as an émigré theater-goer of Sirin's play *Sobytie* (*The Event*, 1938).[21] In addition, he wrote an omnibus essay about the general principles of Sirin's art, where he applied Pushkin's famous anti-Romantic, anti-Küchelbeckerian definition of inspiration ("a disposition of the soul to the liveliest reception of impressions and to the grasp of concepts and, therefore, to an explanation of the latter") to the essentially *religious* nature of all art and, finally, to the formal perfection of Sirin's work, so often misunderstood as lacking "humanity" because of its overpowering brilliance.[22] As Khodasevich had guessed, by playing the magician (*fokusnik*) who exposes his tricks and literary devices (*priemy*) even as he practices them, Sirin was inviting the reader into his "laboratory of wonders"—the realm of co-creation—and drawing him toward his higher humanity. This article, which makes reference to works as varied as *Invitation to a Beheading*, "Terra Incognita" (1931), "Pil'gram" ("The Aurelian," 1930), *The Defense*, *Sogliadatai* (*The Eye*, 1938), and *Despair*, is now generally acknowledged as perhaps the single best contemporaneous source on the émigré Nabokov.

Considering the general difficulty of Sirin's fiction and the fact that Khodasevich was usually forced by the genre of the *podval* (the "basement" section of the newspaper) to report on an excerpt rather than the finished product, the critic possessed a kind of "sixth sense" for alerting the émigré audience to the main structural, conceptual, and characterological issues of a new Sirin novel. For example, about the use of the metaphor of the cinema to present the obsessive and vulgarly predictable *ménage à trois* involving Kretschmar, Magda, and Horn in *Camera Obscura*, he writes "It is not the style of the novel that is permeated and poisoned with the [motif of the] cinema, but the style of life depicted in the novel."[23] Likewise, Khodasevich was the first to identify a pivotal issue in *Despair*: in his desire to commit the perfect crime in the murder of Felix, Hermann the chocolate manufacturer sees himself as "a creator, an artist," and in this sense vies—albeit unsuccessfully—with his author. Khodasevich predicted that the Chernyshevsky biography (the notorious fourth chapter expunged from the *Contemporary Annals* serialization of *The Gift*) "would undoubtedly cause the author considerable pains"—and this despite the fact that "under the guise of a playful joke some very important and

sad things are told." There were, to be sure, lapses owing mainly to the speed with which Khodasevich had to respond: it would be difficult to claim nowadays that *Invitation to a Beheading*, in some ways Sirin's most rigorously composed and metaphysically far-reaching novel, is, like Gogol's "The Nose," "a series of brilliant arabesques . . . joined in their essence not by a unity of ideational design but by a unity of style." Still, on balance, Khodasevich displayed remarkable artistic feel and insider's admiration for Sirin's larger project in what were, after all, deadline-driven exercises in literary journalism. Touchingly indicative of Khodasevich's accumulated opinion of Sirin is a statement he made after commenting somewhat critically on the confusion between comic and serious elements in *The Event*: "My love for Sirin, so often attested to, grants me the right to be very demanding toward him."

Khodasevich and Nabokov first met face to face at Khodasevich's apartment on rue des Quatre Cheminées in October 1932, when Nabokov, who was living in Berlin at the time, came to Paris to give his first public reading.[24] They saw each other on several occasions during Nabokov's stay, and Khodasevich was present at the public reading at the Salle Las Cases on 15 November. Thereafter they did not meet again until early 1936. In the meantime they corresponded with each other, their several detailed letters forming a fascinating source for the verbal "texture" (warm, witty, literarily *au courant*) of their relationship and necessary reading for anyone interested in unraveling the spiritual affinities linking the Fyodor and Koncheyev characters in *The Gift*.[25] For example, in a letter of 26 April 1934 Nabokov writes to Khodasevich about his research into Chernyshevsky's biography for *The Gift*. The tone of the letter reveals two interesting aspects of its author: 1) Nabokov is both repelled *and* attracted (a tension that is perhaps less obvious in the novel itself) by the strange mix of Chernyshevsky's physical torments, ethical integrity, and aesthetic "blindness"; and 2) Nabokov is sharing this confession with Khodasevich as he would with a distinguished *senior* colleague. After all, Khodasevich had himself both studied and been part of literary history—he had learned to write verse under Briusov's tutelage, had been on intimate terms with Bely and Gorky, had sat down in a *tête-à-tête* with Blok, had visited Gumilev on the night he was arrested, and was now, in the twilight of his career, a great Pushkin scholar. It is this "historicity" of literature, this sense that biography and art intersect in the most marvelously precise and unpredictable details, that Nabokov was tapping in his new novel: "The novel I'm writing now—after *Despair*—is monstrously difficult. Among other things, my hero is working on a biography of Chernyshevsky, so I had to read all the masses of books written on the gent—and digest all this my own way, so that now I have heartburn. He had less talent than a lot of people, but more courage than many. In his diaries there is a detailed account of how, by what means and where he vomited (he was poverty ridden, slovenly, ate junk in his student years). Every one of his books is of course utterly dead now, but I searched out here and there (especially in his two novels and in the little pieces written in

the penal colony) some wonderfully human, pitiable things. He was thoroughly tormented. He called Tolstoy 'a vulgarian, decking out his vulgar buttocks with peacock feathers,' Tolstoy called him 'bedbug-stinking' (both in letters to Turgenev), and his wife . . . was rabidly unfaithful."[26]

The two writers performed together as "co-conspirators" on 8 February 1936 at the Salle Las Cases, where Khodasevich read his brilliant "mystification," "The Life of Vasily Travnikov" (taken by virtually all present as an historically accurate accounting of the life of a major undiscovered early nineteenth-century poet), and Sirin read three stories. This was a delightful episode, which as so much else involving the two friends took Pushkin as its cue. Khodasevich and Sirin derived great pleasure in duping, among others, Georgy Adamovich: the latter stood for everything that was "un-Pushkinian" in the poetry and literary politics of the time. For the better part of a decade Khodasevich had been polemicizing with Adamovich over the course Russian literature in exile should take. At the same time, Adamovich had been finding his own ways, typically with backhanded praise, to downplay the achievements of Sirin's fiction. Both Adamovich and his friend the poet Georgy Ivanov were influential on the younger generation: Adamovich as a critic for *The Latest News* and Ivanov as a source for the "Parisian note" and "human document" that sounded so persistently—and to Khodasevich's mind so whiningly and with such disregard for craft—in their verse. Ivanov had personal scores to settle with both Khodasevich and Sirin, and he had written nasty, if not scurrilous, reviews of their work. Moreover, in the early thirties the Adamovich–Ivanov faction had effectively boycotted the work of either Khodasevich or Sirin in *Chisla* (*Numbers*), an important new "thick journal" that opened its pages to the younger generation and was seen to compete with the more established *Contemporary Annals*.

Thus, when Khodasevich was able to hoist Adamovich on his own petard (Travnikov was so "real" to Adamovich that the latter was taken in by the ruse, thus proving that Khodasevich could "imagine" a figure more convincing than "fact"), a very Pushkinian battle was won. Adamovich's and Ivanov's principal criticisms of both Khodasevich and Sirin had been the latters' formal brilliance at the expense of "life" and the honesty of "despair"; now, however, these criticisms were shown to be hollow. Dour and acidly skeptical of temperament, denied the rights of a nobleman and deemed illegitimate when his parents' marriage was found to be illegal, having lost half a leg in childhood and then, in young manhood, the love of his life (Elena) to smallpox, terrorized by a mad and drunken father, Vasily Travnikov was portrayed to be as dark and broken a man as any of Adamovich's group of Russian Montparnassians. And yet Travnikov was, to judge by the excerpts provided at the end of Khodasevich's pastiche, a serious and accomplished poet. "Life" cannot be generated in art without a strong sense of form.

Ironically, Sirin perpetrated at least two similar ruses on the Adamovich–Ivanov group: the first involved his 1933 story "Usta k ustam" ("Lips to Lips")

and the second his pseudonymous poem on Khodasevich's death entitled "Poety" ("The Poets," 1939).[27] "Lips to Lips" appeared to be straight fiction but in fact was an elaborate code of devastating "in-jokes" aimed at a real-life occurrence—the cynical manipulation of a local émigré Maecenas (Alexander Burov) by the editor(s) at *Numbers*. As Sergej Davydov has convincingly demonstrated, the code was so ingenious that it may not have been discovered by the *Numbers* people. More to the point, even if it were discovered, they would have no way to divert its darts without exposing themselves. In typical Nabokovian fashion, the author would get the "last word" when a subsequent generation would uncover the mystery and show, long after the fact, the editorial machinations for what they were.[28] Likewise, the use of a different name, Vasily Shishkov, and a meter heretofore rarely tried by Sirin tricked Adamovich into reading the Khodasevich eulogy "objectively," without the filter of past envy; when Adamovich praised the poem, as he had Khodasevich's earlier account of the first "Vasily," the game was won.[29] In all these instances of a literary hoax, the ghost of Pushkin presides, since it was the latter who first impersonated himself as "Feofilakt Kosichkin" in order to fabricate the most effective polemical voice—one of feigned ignorance that "Pushkin" himself would have been unable to adopt—in order to defeat his arch-antagonist, the opportunistic writer Faddei Bulgarin.

Khodasevich and Nabokov continued their friendship up until Khodasevich's death. They met several times in 1937 (Khodasevich introduced his friend at an evening devoted to Sirin on 24 January) and then more often after September 1938, when Nabokov and his family moved to Paris. But unfortunately by the late spring of 1939 the disease (hepatic cancer) that would kill Khodasevich (on June 14) had entered its terminal phase: already in gradual decline since the start of the new year, Khodasevich could no longer receive guests and had to remain in bed. The last time Nabokov was able to see his favorite literary compatriot was on 7 May. Nabokov attended the funeral of Khodasevich on 16 June and then wrote, in *Contemporary Annals*, one of the most beautiful and moving necrologies in the Russian language. He called his friend "the greatest Russian poet of our time, Pushkin's literary descendant in Tyutchev's line of succession, [who] shall remain the pride of Russian poetry as long as its last memory lives,"[30] and concluded his valedictory thoughts with the following: "[A]ll is finished now: the bequeathed gold shines on a shelf in full view of the future, whilst the goldminer has left for the region from where, perhaps, a faint something reaches the ears of good poets, penetrating our being with the beyond's fresh breath and conferring upon art that mystery which more than anything chracterizes its essence. . . . There is no consolation, if one starts to encourage the sense of loss by one's own private recollections of a brief, brittle, human image that melts like a hailstone on a window sill. Let us turn to the poems."[31]

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NOTES

1. For background on the Khodasevich–Nabokov friendship, see: Berberova, "Nabokov in the Thirties," pp. 220–33; Boyd, 1990, and 1991, passim; and Malmstad, pp. 277–91. Information on Khodasevich's life and work can be found in Bethea, 1983. Individual articles written by Nabokov on Khodasevich and by Khodasevich on Nabokov are discussed below.
2. A precise translation of Nabokov–Sirin's Russian novel into English would be "The Luzhin Defense."
3. "Vse slushali stikhi moi," in Khodasevich, *Sobranie*, p. 123.
4. The "European Night" section of the *Collected Verse* never appeared as a separate book, although its placement in the volume suggested its author considered it a self-enclosed entity comparable to *Grain's Way* and *The Heavy Lyre*.
5. Sirin, "Vladislav Khodasevich."
6. Ibid.
7. The use of the "verse prosaism" goes back to Pushkin, who coined the term in a typically self-ironizing phrase—nenuzhnyi prozaizm (unnecessary prosaism)—in the poem "Osen'" ("Autumn," 1833). On the verse prosaism in Pushkin and Khodasevich, see Bethea, 1983, pp. 75–79.
8. Khodasevich, *Sobranie*, pp. 143–44.
9. Nabokov, *Stikhotvoreniia*, pp. 251–52.
10. As has been argued elsewhere, this imagery (the spilled seed) derives from the myth of the biblical Onan, who was struck down by the Lord because he "spilled [his] semen on the ground, lest he should give offspring to his brother"—he had failed to fulfill "*the duty of the brother-in-law* . . . [to] raise up a male descendant for his deceased brother and thus perpetuate his name and inheritance." In this regard, the Khodasevich and Sirin personas project a fear of being unable to sire a new descendant for their "dead brother"—the line of Russian poetry that remained behind in Russia. See Genesis 38: 8–10, and Bethea, 1983, pp. 294.
11. There are numerous subtextual and thematic parallels between Khodasevich's poetry and Nabokov–Sirin's poetry and prose which the limitations of space prevent us from discussing in detail. Some of these might include: the artist as acrobat/tightrope-walker (Khodasevich, *Sobranie*, p. 18, and Nabokov, *Stikhotvoreniia*, pp. 236–37), the creative personality as Narcissus (Khodasevich, *Sobranie*, p. 23, and Nabokov, *Despair*, pp. 13, 15, 62), and the "this world"/"other world" dichotomy as a piece of fabric that can be turned over (Khodasevich, *Sobranie*, p. 59, and Nabokov, *The Gift*, p. 314), etc.
12. As Nabokov wrote in 1931 in a poem entitled "Neokonchennyi chernovik" ("Unfinished Draft"): "People fear me because / I am malevolent, cold, and merry, / because I serve no one, because I have weighed my life and honor / on Pushkin's scales, and [it is] honor / I make bold to prefer" ("Menia strashatsia potomu, / chto zol ia, kholoden i vesel, / chto ne sluzhu ia nikomu, / chto zhizn' i chest' moiu ia vzvesil, / na pushkinskikh vesakh, i chest' / osmelivaius' predpochest'") (*Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 256). These lines could just as easily serve as Khodasevich's epitaph.
13. The poet describes himself as a latter-day Satan in the great poem "Bel'skoe ust'e" (1921). See Khodasevich, *Sobranie*, pp. 96–97.

14. "Ia, ia, ia. Chto za dikoe slovo! / Neuzheli von tot—eto ia? / Razve mama liubila takogo, / Zheltoserogo, polysedogo / I vseznaiushchego, kak zmeia?" (Khodasevich, *Sobranie* , pp. 158–59).
15. Berberova, *Kursiv*, p. 255.
16. Khodasevich, "Literatura v emigratsii."
17. Khodasevich, "*Zashchita Luzhina.*"
18. Or perhaps, more properly, "Pushkinian," since neither Khodasevich nor Nabokov–Sirin ever had anything to do with Acmeism as a literary movement. The belief that the phenomenal world was beautiful and worthy in its own right and not simply source material for figurative, "symbolic" meanings was something that Khodasevich and Nabokov came to naturally, organically, and thereafter always associated with Pushkin's aesthetics.
19. Khodasevich, "*Zashchita Luzhina.*"
20. See Bethea, 1983, pp. 83–87, 120, 129–30, 153–55; Boyd, 1990, pp. 189–95, 447–78.
21. See, for example, Khodasevich's remarks on Sirin's works in the following issues of *Vozrozhdenie* (*The Renaissance*): 27 October 1932 (*Camera Obscura*), 3 May 1934 (*Kamera obskura*), 8 November 1934 (*Despair*), 11 July 1935 (*Invitation to a Beheading*), 28 November 1935 (*Invitation to a Beheading*), 12 March 1936 (*Invitation to a Beheading*), 8 August 1936 ("Spring in Fialta"), 15 May 1937 (*The Gift*), 15 October 1937 (*The Gift*), 25 February 1938 (*The Gift*), 24 June 1938 (*The Gift*), 11 November 1938 (*The Gift*), 22 July 1938 (*The Event*), 24 March 1939 ("The Visit to the Museum"). See also Khodasevich's substantial article about the performance of *The Event* in *Sovremennye zapiski* (*Contemporary Annals,* 1938).
22. Khodasevich, "*O Sirine.*"
23. Khodasevich and Nabokov–Sirin seem to have had quite similar views on the quintessentially modern medium of the cinema. It would be interesting to know, for example, whether Nabokov–Sirin had read Khodasevich's article entitled "O kinematografe" ("On the Cinema"), which appeared in *The Renaissance* on 28 October 1926, when he wrote his poem "Kinematograf" ("The Cinema," 1928; see Nabokov, *Stikhotvoreniia*, pp. 396–97). Also, Khodasevich's play with the related image of the double-exposed snapshot in his great long poem *Sorrentinskie fotografii* (*Sorrento Photographs,* 1926) would have been immensely appealing to Nabokov, who loved optical illusions and "magic box" structures. See, e.g., the poem "Snimok" ("Photo," 1927) in Nabokov, *Stikhotvoreniia*, p. 220.
24. The various meetings between Khodasevich and Nabokov are precisely outlined in Malmstad, pp. 277–91.
25. Nina Berberova was the first to suggest a correspondence between the Fyodor–Koncheyev fictional characters and the real-life figures of Khodasevich and Nabokov. But as several scholars have argued since then, the correspondence was never simple or straightforwardly one-to-one. (The same holds true of the allegation that the fictionalized critic Christopher Mortus is none other than Nabokov's and Khodasevich's chief antagonist of the 1930s Georgy Adamovich.) Nabokov himself has denied that he has portrayed himself in Fyodor. Moreover, Fyodor and Koncheyev appear to be rough coevals in the novel, whereas in life Khodasevich was considerably older than Nabokov. But Nabokov was always one to "cover his tracks" in this way. The point to be made here is that, both spiritually and in terms of artistic tastes and temperaments,

the *principal* sources for Koncheyev and Fyodor are, respectively, Khodasevich and Nabokov.

26. Cited in Boyd, 1990, pp. 406–407.
27. See as well Boyd's discussion (1990, p. 370) of "Iz kalmbrudovoi poemy 'Nochnoe puteshestvie'" ("From Vivian Calmbrood's poem 'The Night Journey,'" 1931), where under the anagrammatic pseudonym "Vivian Calmbrood" Nabokov–Sirin parodies Adamovich's "tin lyre" and has his hero embrace the Pushkin surrogate "Chenston."
28. Davydov, *Teksty-Matreshki*, pp. 10–51.
29. Boyd, 1990, pp. 509–10.
30. Nabokov repeated this opinion about Khodasevich being the greatest Russian poet of the twentieth century several times.
31. Nabokov, "On Hodasevich," pp. 223, 227. Original in *Sovremennye zapiski* (1939).

NABOKOV AND POE

The pen of Edgar Allan Poe left a ghostly trace in the texts of Vladimir Nabokov, both early and late, in poetry as in prose. As a famous (and famously opinionated) author, Nabokov freely admitted to a boyhood enthusiasm for Poe, but he also claimed in his maturity to have set aside "Edgarpoe" as a faded favorite (*SO* 42–43, 64). Such summary dismissals of literary kinfolk typically occurred whenever interviewers pressed Nabokov too hard or too crudely for admissions of influence: "I can always tell when a sentence I compose happens to resemble in cut and intonation that of any of the writers I loved or detested half a century ago; but I do not believe that any particular writer has had any definite influence upon me" (*SO* 46). What is most telling about Nabokov's repudiation of so-called literary influences is his assumption that awareness of a stylistic echo removes the spell of an ancestor. It mattered to Nabokov to be clear about matters of apparent sameness; he drew careful distinctions between conscious and unconscious resemblances, between translations and travesties. It follows, then, that Nabokov's pride in his writing's conscious evocation of literary precedent dictated an art of composition that was always close to the wit of parody, inviting a shared enjoyment of decoded references to the features of a precursor. But it so happens that this conception of genuine artistry's appreciation of its own literariness derives in large measure from Poe's own theoretical understanding of the poetic process. It was no accident that parodies of Poe kept recurring throughout the career of the Russian conjuror who specialized in producing verbal mirages of lost love objects. These parodies allowed Nabokov to distance himself from subjection to the "influence" of Poe while consciously (and ironically) continuing to cultivate Poe's poetic principles in a post-Romantic age. There are, in short, larger affinities with Poe than the obvious play with allusions would suggest.

Only recently have literary critics (Maddox; Sweeney, 1991) begun to explore the larger effect of Poe's prior texts on Nabokov's poetics, noting the pervasive thematic role of "enchanted hunters" of unpossessed shapes of loveliness and of "purloined letters," cloaked literary thefts, in the poems and narratives of both writers. But scholars have long observed that Nabokov's *Lolita* could not have existed without a love for elaborate parody of Edgar Allan Poe. For understandable reasons, that most notorious and noticed novel has become the focal point for most commentary on the Nabokov-Poe connection. As Alfred Appel, Jr., has definitively proven, Poe is the most conspicuous source of allusions in Humbert Humbert's highly literary "confessional" narrative of his romantic quest to possess the essence of "Lolita."[1]

One peculiarity of *Lolita*'s many intertextual references to Poe was already evident to the first explicator (Phillips, 1960) who pointed out that Humbert's account of his own romantic affliction drew analogies to Poe's biography as well as to materials from his poetry and fiction. This is important because it highlights the narrator's facile fusion of an artist's life with the artist's texts in stark contrast to the distinction the reader must draw between Nabokov himself and Humbert Humbert. Indeed, one of the permanent challenges faced by critics wishing to account for the exceptional visibility of allusions to Poe in *Lolita* is how to distinguish between Humbert's invocations and Nabokov's intentions. Humbert is only occasionally aware that the narrative he composes is rehearsing plots that obsessively recur in Poe's writing whereas Nabokov presides in full consciousness over all the allusions that scholars have excavated.[2] The quest to repossess a vanished eidolon (Lolita) and the pursuit of a hallucinated, hidden double (Quilty) replicate central features of Poe's lyrics and detective stories, but Humbert sees an analogous sameness where Nabokov is exposing a parodic difference. Whereas one can appreciate the rhetorical gain Humbert derives from associating his "nympholepsy" with a literary genealogy, the purpose and tone of Nabokov's conspicuous mimicry of Poe remain very much in dispute.

At the outset of his artful confession and seductive narrative, Humbert Humbert speaks a stark truth: "In point of fact there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child. In a princedom by the sea" (*Lo* 9). The first consequence of this admission is that Humbert himself perceives his Lolita as a spectral love, the phantasmic facsimile of a lost Riviera figure of desire. We learn that his nympholepsy, or condition of being captivated by "nymphets," is a question of focal adjustment: the inner eye of thwarted desire leaps at the chance to impose an archetypal form of loveliness on any semblance that comes along. Visually, then, Humbert's Lolita is presented as a kind of found poem, an involuntary composition, "a little ghost in natural colors" (*Lo* 11).

But Humbert's Lolita is also simultaneously a made poem, a verbal artifact. As the recuperated image of an initial beauty born in a Poe-etic atmosphere, "a princedom by the sea," Lolita's derivation is as much verbal as

optical. She is *consciously* evoked as a reiteration of the already read, as a warmed-over quotation from a haunting literary echo. This Lolita is made of the stuff from which waking daydreams are made—inaccurate translations from poetry into life. As is appropriate to a dealer in Anglo-French poetry manuals for lazy students, Humbert Humbert has conceived a passion for a tawdry American translation of a Continental original who was herself conjured from a sonorous resemblance to Poe's "immemorial" lost love, "Annabel Lee." Humbert's narrative reveals a character in whom nympholepsy and literacy have combined to create an endless imprisonment in the zoo of words. In believing that he can reincarnate an unattainable original, Humbert is in the unenviable position of being an unwitting parodist who "relates to" his own invention.

Fortunately, the author who designed Humbert's performed narrative has arranged for his readers to share, yet be liberated from the narrator's captivity. We can see that Nabokov has selected Poe texts as pretexts for visible parody, yet we have also been implicated in envisaging Humbert's Lolita. A lesser artist might well have employed parody, like the proverbial ten-foot pole, to establish a safe distance from an alien presence. But in Nabokov's hands parody made visible is not necessarily risible. It is not a simple instrument of satire. To what end has Nabokov practised the art of parody?

Nabokov consistently held an unconventional attitude toward parody, finding in it something rather more interesting and complicated than a transparent rejection of a highly stylized content. The standard Formalist (and Marxist) view insisted that parody was the "destructive or depreciative imitation" of a literary model in which a deliberately stylized speech is marked as the satirized voice of an opposite "other."[3] Nabokov, on the contrary, sensed in parody not a "grotesque imitation," but a playful collision of tradition with critical talent, as in his praise of Joycean parody for the "sudden junction of its cliches with the fireworks and tender sky of real poetry" (*SO* 75–76). The fact is that parody is always a form of reluctant tribute to the unforgotten appeal of a once-seductive paradigm. Like a game, parody is a time-consuming artifice that entertains even as it announces itself as an autonomous realm of delusion. Thus, the art of parody admits to a penchant for serious play with a transparent illusion. As I shall argue, the practice of Nabokovian parody is quite in accord with Poe's explicit understanding of poetic composition. Nabokov's numerous parodies of Poe are literary tributaries that flow from a common source of inspiration—the insight that genuine poetry is inseparable from the spirit of parody.

One deep and lasting affinity between Poe and Nabokov can be measured by their shared challenge to the platitudes of a "humanist" defense of poetry. Well before Vladimir Nabokov had surfaced as the scourge and public scold of "human interest" criticism and of the "great ideas" approach to literary merit, Poe had scandalized American public opinion (and even given a *frisson* to Baudelaire) by excommunicating from literary criticism "the heresy of *The*

Didactic." Edgar Allan Poe stoutly proclaimed that the proper business of poetry was "the poem which is a poem and nothing more"; the authentic domain of the poetry of words, and the source of its poetic effect, was "the Rhythmical creation of Beauty."[4] Yet a surprising parodox followed from Poe's apparently narrow definition of literary power. For Poe, as for Nabokov, genuine art was both a supremely conscious verbal activity and the mysterious utterance of an intuition beyond common sense and common morality.

In "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846), Poe deliberately deglamorized the myth of poetic frenzy, arguing that the effect of art was to convey a unity of impression that could only be achieved by conscious design—"the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem" (15). Yet in "The Poetic Principle" (1850), Poe acknowledged that the impetus to conceive and utter a patterned textual unity derived from a higher Intuition, a Platonic shade, of Beauty: "We struggle, by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to Eternity alone" (77). (In that very Nabokovian formulation perhaps nothing is quite so like the later Nabokov as that agnostic "perhaps"!) Poe-etic composition was, then, a curiously melancholy and unfree exercise of a conscious fluency in making verbal surfaces and sounds imitate an intuited harmony. This splendid substitute universe of verbal manipulation was cause for both celebration and mourning. Aesthetic utterance was indeed a pale fire, the afterglow of a dazzling premonition. Nabokov's own shadow-poet, John Shade, had surely read both his Plato and his Poe very carefully before phrasing his playful conceit: "Maybe my sensual love for the *consonne / D'appui*, Echo's fey child, is based upon / A feeling of fantastically planned, / Richly rhymed life" (*PF* 68).

Edgar Allan Poe must be taken seriously as both a precursor and mentor to the Russian grandmaster of aesthetic play. Nabokov's formative Petersburg years coincided with the heyday of Poe's Russian reputation; Konstantin Bal'mont was busily duplicating for Russians Baudelaire's heroic and harrowing image of an unappreciated "Columbus of new regions of the human soul" (Grossman). With the reissue, in 1884, of Baudelaire's translations, *Histoires Extraordinaires*, all of Europe had the French "metaphysical" Poe at its fingertips. And the Russian climate became especially receptive to the new wave of post-Realist aestheticism after 1895. Well before the erudite poet Voloshin introduced Nabokov in the Crimea to Bely's technical analyses of the relationship of rhythm to meter in Russian poetics, the young Nabokov was surely familiar with the volume in the Nabokov family library, *Ballady i Fantazii*, in which Bal'mont compiled his earliest Russian translations from English of the most famous works of the writer he called the "first Symbolist."[5] Either in the English originals or in Bal'mont's later translations of Poe's literary essays (enthusiastically reviewed by Blok), Nabokov surely was also well aware of Poe's announced poetic principles. In any event, Poe's presence

as a technician of rhythmical beauty can be clearly felt in the cadences and themes of the young poet who emerged as the legendary Sirin.

Consider, for instance, both the sound and sense of the first and third quatrains of one of the early poems Nabokov chose to reprint in the 1979 Ardis collection of his verse: "V khrustal'nyi shar zakliucheny my byli, / i mimo zvezd leteli my s toboi, / stremitel'no, bezmolvno my skol'zili / iz bleska v blesk blazhenno-goluboi . . . No chei-to vzdokh razbil nash shar khrustal'nyi, / ostanovil nash ognennyi poryv, / i potselui prerval nash beznachal'nyi, / i v plennyi mir nas brosil, razluchiv." ("Enclosed in a crystal globe were we, / and past the stars flew you and I, / swiftly, silently did we glide / from gleam to blissful sky-blue gleam . . . But someone's breath burst our crystal globe, / halted our fiery rush, / and sundered our timeless kiss, / and hurled us, separate, into a captive world.") The lyric was composed in the Crimea in 1918, before Nabokov had gone into permanent exile or begun to conceive *Ada*, his epic romance of the hellish separation of twin-souled lovers. It resonates in perfect harmony with the music and standard libretto of much Poe-etry. Nabokov is here orchestrating an elegy of angelic displacement that bears rather startling resemblance to a description of young Poe by St. Petersburg's best-known commentator on the American genius: "In practically a childhood poem, his 'Al Aaraaf'—he wasn't twenty yet—he had conceived a self-generated Platonic theory of poetry. The Deity says to the angel-like being, Nisace: 'Leave your crystal star [ostav' svoiu khrustal'nuiu zvezdu], spread your splendor to other worlds . . . *reveal my secrets*'."[6]

Virtually in his own boyhood, Nabokov had composed his rendition of a fall from a world of higher harmony—in this case, housed within "a crystal globe." In a time before time began, in a kind of primordial amniotic sac, two angelic spirits float in a rapturous unity. Nabokov's verse observes the classic decorum of iambic pentameter with a strict caesura at the second foot, yet it also gracefully scuds into fluent, tripping ternary rhythms. And this effect is similar to Poe's characteristic anapestic lilt which he achieves by alternating line lengths and by making free use of spondees and pyrrhics.[7] Even more typically Poe-etic, however, is the rude rhythmic interruption at mid-poem that coincides with a dramatized fall from grace. Both in "Annabel Lee" and in this early Nabokov lyric, a chilling breath bursts the bubble of a lofty bliss. As the twin-souled lovers are catapulted into a world of time and difference, the strict rule of meter suddenly, rigidly replaces the graceful lilting rhythm.

Exiled to the strictly measured confines of earth-bound mortality, it would seem that only in dreams can "the quiver of astral dust / and the wondrous din" of celestial harmonies be recovered. Or so Nabokov's penultimate stanza suggests. But then, as in Poe's allegedly morbid love poems, victory is snatched from the maw of defeat by the power of verbal incantation: "Khot' my grustim i raduemsia rozno, / tvoe litso, sred' vsekh prekrasnykh lits, / mogu uznat' po etoi pyli zvezdnoi, / ostavsheisia na konchikakh resnits. . . . ("Though we grieve and rejoice apart, / your face, 'midst all the beauteous ones, / I can

detect by that trace of starry ash, / left behind on the tips of every lash. . . .") Here, as in so many of Poe's elegiac love lyrics, a survivor's imagination avidly attaches itself to a spectral image, an eidolon. The Poe-etic speaker knows how to rise to ecstasy inside a sonorous structure of rhymed signs that is the verbal figure for solipsistic glee. Poe's unreconciled champions of a lost, pure love typically create for themselves an artificial paradise of euphonious speech and "lie" by it, the verbal epitaph, forever. Given a high enough fidelity to this incantatory music of resonant sound and reiterated image, nothing "can ever dissever my soul from the soul / of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE."

As evidenced by his melodious and witty lyric of 1918, the young Nabokov could readily imitate and emulate the imperfect, substitutionary bliss of truly Poe-etic evocations of remembered raptures. The lovelorn speaker in Nabokov's poem is a fallen angel who openly acknowledges the catastrophe of differentiation that replaces a perfect celestial harmony. But at the same time, the poem's last stanza makes audible the exiled singer's attempted restoration of "timeless" perceptions. The strain of rebuilding paradise from verbal traces is exposed in the cunningly imperfect rhymes of the last quatrain. The penultimate rhyme is the first imprecise euphony in the entire performance (*rozno / zvezdnoi*) and the final rhyme enacts the willed substitution of a shadowy part for an irrecoverable whole (*lits / resnits*). It is as if Nabokov already knew that verbal artistry was, at best, a synecdoche for an ineffable entity, an unspeakable intuition.

Edgar Allan Poe's earliest definition of poetry maintained that it was a distinctive use of language having for its immediate object an indefinite pleasure; a poem was a work "presenting perceptible images . . . with indefinite sensations, to which end music is an *essential*, since the comprehension of sweet sound is our most indefinite conception" (*Essays*, 11). More recently, critics have noted that Poe's poetry combines an obsessive theme with an obligatory musicality that deliberately obscures referential meaning. A Poe poem, in one influential formulation, is always the metrical account of an archetypal action, a song–narrative relating the strains of a voice "struggling to say what he has seen in a world so unlike ours that he has difficulty using the language of ours to describe it."[8] Another way of putting the same point rightly emphasizes the melancholy core that fuels Poe-etic composition. Always the activity of verbal creation is occasioned by a prior fall from a happy prescience, "leaving the poet with (and within) a medium that only traces, 'in a nebulous light,' the original and unrepeated creative moment."[9] This way of positioning the genesis of Poe's lyrics creates a noteworthy intersection with Nabokov's life-long obsessive reweaving of lost textures of experience. It was no random coincidence that both Poe and Nabokov dramatized verbal creation as an act of refiguring once-enchanting figures. In Poe's poetry, in Humbert's memoir, and in Nabokov's sophisticated parodies the verbal sign is an image that remarks the absence of an original, unrepeatable form.

Through Poe's poetic and prosaic example, the young Nabokov encountered an "otherworldly" shade of Platonic Idealism written into dramas of exiled consciousnesses, enthralled and tormented by what they could vaguely bring to mind through frustratingly imprecise words. In an unpublished parable of January 1923, "The Word" ("Slovo"), a dreaming man wakes in a pearl and jasper heaven wishing to articulate the beauty and suffering of his former existence. He finally is understood by one angel, himself not quite detached from earth, who, taking pity, divulges one word that explains the mystery of the two existences. Crying that word aloud, the man awakes again to mortal life with no recollection of the all-explaining word. Boyd rightly acknowledges that this brief tale is "reminiscent of Poe's symbolic tales," and that it presages the obsessive theme in the later Nabokov of an all-resolving secret uttered only at the borderline between death and life.[10] It is also of interest to note that Nabokov's future bride was already in close psychic harmony with her life-companion's cast of mind; on July 29 of that same year Véra Slonim published next to a Sirin poem in the Russian émigré newspaper *Rul'* her own translation of another of Poe's otherworldly parables, "Silence."[11]

Well before and well after the parodic double exposure of Poe and Humbert in *Lolita*, Nabokov's prose works repeatedly rehearsed the thematics and paradigmatic plots of Poe's tales. In "The Return of Chorb" (1925) Nabokov wittily retraced one of Poe's most familiar compositional paths. In relating the tragicomedy of a widower's project of repossessing his virginal bride through a reverse reconstruction of the perfect image he had wed but not taken to bed, Nabokov was recycling one of the trademark Gothic plots of Edgar Allan Poe. In a series of world-famous stories ("Morella," "Berenice," and especially "Ligeia") Poe had made his own a special variant on the theme of metempsychosis; a distraught artist–lover attempts to transcend loss through artful (though often compulsive) restitutions of the obsessively remembered furnishings and features of an idealized lady love. This motif extends far and wide in the prose fiction of Vladimir Nabokov. It is obviously present in the elaborate, ambitious verbal restorations of the "primal scenes" of romantic ecstasy when Mary, or Zina, or Hazel Shade, or Ada first captivated the imagination of a Nabokovian poet–protagonist. It is a theme still very much present in and central to Nabokov's penultimate novel, *Transparent Things*—a work which also manages to retrieve and elaborate upon a rare and ignored genre that Poe had pioneered: the posthumous dialogue among shades.

Informed readers of Poe and Nabokov eventually have had to ask themselves what to make of certain opaque fictions that are transparently about the afterlife. Just as Nabokov's critics are only lately coming to terms with an undeniable "spectral dimension" in a number of ghostly stories, so, too, Poe scholars only belatedly addressed his baffling angelic colloquies.[12] There are some curious resemblances between the narrative frames of Poe's best-known posthumous dialogue, "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion" (1839) and *Transparent Things* (1972); surely one can suspect that Poe

provided one source for the odd genre of vaguely allegorical "physics fiction" that Nabokov served up late in his writing career.[13]

In Poe's short colloquy, a veteran of post-mortal existence greets a newcomer at the threshold of a painless, omniscient realm called Aidenn. His words of greeting carry a significant double entendre: "Dreams are with us no more . . . I rejoice to see you looking life-like and rational . . . I will myself induct you into the full joys and wonders of your novel [sic!] existence."[14] This hint of a "metafictional" level of meaning is remarkably close to the benevolent coaching of a disembodied voice that greets Hugh Person (you, person) at the entry point of his posthumous existence as a character recently transferred into the apparent transparency of a textual realm of being. And Poe's fable, like Nabokov's short novel, also contains the irony that the all-seeing privilege of an "afterlife" is employed in seeking the words to depict the feel and sensation of a now-departed world. Although all ties to the mortal coil are severed, an adequate language is sought to recollect the familiar feel of a perished existence. Although a transfer into a new reality has in fact occurred, the verbal medium serves as a vehicle of transport back into an obliterated and unrecoverable world. Expressed this way, Poe's cosmological fantasy of the "angelic imagination" reconceiving an exterminated earthly garden is not so far removed from the fantastic perceptions of Nabokov's poetic sleep-walkers who insist upon superimposing one world on another.

Language must deal in artificial likenesses, in approximations that strive to align sound and sense, signifier and signified. The notion that one can literally re-present or re-produce human experience is a figment of some angelic imagination. What we readers commonly accept as renewed contact with significant aspects of our lives is never more than a ghost play with verbal shades and visual shadows. We contemplate a parody of an obscure primary text.

In Nabokov's writings, as in Poe's poetry and prose fantasies, lyrical commemoration of what has been lost cannot be far removed from the spirit of parody. If parody is understood as a transparent mistranslation of an original text that is distorted, but not beyond recognition, then it is a form of utterance that is akin to poetry as understood by Edgar Allan Poe. A Poe poem draws attention to its own substitutionary inadequacy, being in its obvious artificing of sound and image the pale reminder of an absent form it cannot replace. Poe's poetic principles are Platonic since his melancholy singers understand, like Socrates in the *Cratylus* dialogue, that verbal mimesis always marks a loss: "Names rightly given are the likenesses and images of the things which they name."[15] Words knowingly employed are at their beautiful best but replicas and foreshadowings of an intuited Form that has been eroded in the stream of mortal time.

Parodies of Poe and shades of Plato regularly recur within Nabokov's works. It is not very surprising that Nabokov should have paid regular tribute to his fellow poets of the mind's exile in a lapsed world. Although shy of

metaphysics and contemptuous of vulgar spiritualism, Nabokov fully appreciated the need for some recourse to alleviate the pain of early dispossession of a world of remembered harmony and grace. But why, then, the evident impulse to parody his strong predecessors?

A certain type of knowing artistry could provide consolation and even some bliss through *conscious* parodies and *admitted* simulations of vanished moments of significance. Thus John Shade, Nabokov's poet of combinational delights, could proclaim: "I tore apart the fantasies of Poe, / And dealt with childhood memories of strange / Nacreous gleams beyond the adults' range" (*PF* 56). Genuine art was the diversionary play of creative memory; it made possible the joy of a figurative restoration of lost experience within the tyranny of the cruel present. Nabokov's survival artist, himself a Shade, was thus a master parodist whose intellect was well aware of how texts translate the irreversible actuality of worldly phenomena into a new dimension of reflected reality.

Nabokov's many conscious parodies of Poe were themselves schooled in Poe's philosophy of composition. Both writers were explicitly aware of that trick of human consciousness that enables the conjuror of words and images to straddle two worlds at once and, as it were, to get away with "two-timing" life. They composed texts that deliberately exposed the transference and the transport, the genuine otherworldliness, that could be achieved by an inspired and well-regulated manipulation of the sensation-creating medium of language. True poetry is composed as a knowingly inaccurate, but necessary translation of an unforgotten, unrecovered source of inspiration. Poe's poetic principles and example had indeed anticipated that much-quoted conundrum from Nabokov's *Gift*: "the spirit of parody always goes along with genuine poetry" (12).

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NOTES

1. Appel, *AnL* pp. 328–32.
2. The most complete discussions, other than Appel's, of the many allusions in *Lolita* to Poe's poems and stories may be found in Proffer, *Keys to Lolita*, pp. 34–45, and in Maddox, pp. 72–76.
3. For a valuable survey of historic definitions of parody, see Markiewicz. Some influential Russian definitions are available in English; see Tynyanov and Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 193–96.
4. The particular phrasings are from "The Poetic Principle" in Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, pp. 75–76. All further citations from Poe's essays are from the Library of America edition and page references are given in parentheses.
5. On the subject of Nabokov's analytic appreciation of Russian verse, see Boyd, 1990, pp. 149–52, and especially G. S. Smith, 1991. In Bal'mont, 1895, one finds important early Russian versions of "The Raven," "Annabel Lee," "The Fall of the House of

Usher," "Ligeia," and of "Shadow" and "Silence"—those metaphysical parables in a literary form Bal'mont labels in his introduction as unique to Poe, "fantasias that can be called philosophical tales."

6. Anichkov, p. 249—a reprinting of his influential article of 1909, "Baudelaire and Edgar Poe." On the importance of Anichkov among educated St. Petersburg readers, see Grossman, p. 163.
7. Proffer, *Keys to Lolita*, p. 36, speaks specifically of the "anapestic lilt" created by the rhythmic phrasings of "Annabel Lee"—"I was a child and she was a child, / In this kingdom by the sea; / But we loved with a love that was more than love— / I and my ANNABEL LEE." Incidentally, Smith's (1991) statistically-based study of Nabokov's metrics displays a clear-cut preference for iambic and anapestic groups, a strong proclivity for exact rhymes and quatrains, and he rather significantly concludes that Bal'mont was probably "his chief mentor in his earlier work" (301–302).
8. Hoffman, p. 59.
9. Riddel, p. 121.
10. Boyd, 1990, p. 203.
11. Ibid., p. 210.
12. For an early (and literal-minded) pursuit of the supernatural in Nabokov, see Rowe, 1981; the most complete explication of the "metaphysical" dimension apparently signalled within Nabokov's aesthetic is Alexandrov, 1991. On Poe, see Tate for a sophisticated essay on the "angelic imagination" at work in the otherworldly cosmological fantasies.
13. A fuller version of a parallel reading of *Transparent Things* and Poe's otherworldly fable is in Peterson, 1989, pp. 101–104.
14. Poe, *Poetry and Tales*, p. 358.
15. Humphries, pp. 18–27, offers an elegant explication of the Platonic epistemology that informs Poe's poetics.

NABOKOV AND PROUST

In the mid-1960s Nabokov told Alvin Toffler that Proust had been one of his favorite authors between 1919 and 1939 (*SO* 43). Then, in an interview with Robert Hughes, he singled out "the first half of Proust's fairy tale *In Search of Lost Time*,"[1] which he ranked fourth among twentieth-century masterpieces in prose (*SO* 57).[2] The significance of this relationship has intrigued Nabokov's readers since at least 1930, when the émigré journal *Chisla* asked him whether Proust was "the most powerful spokesman of our epoch" and whether he would "have a decisive influence."[3] At that time Nabokov gave no clear answer; later research, though it has commented suggestively on his career after 1950, has yet to provide a detailed account of Nabokov's earlier interests in Proust.

His contacts with Proust must date back to the early 1920s, even if we discount *Look at the Harlequins!* which links the year 1922 with "a curious French novel (*Du côté de chez Swann*)" (31).[4] It is more useful, however, to ask

when and how Nabokov acknowledges Proust as a major reference point for his own creativity, but here the evidence is somewhat unclear and conflicting. Thus Philip Sicker has shown that Nabokov's early short fiction deals with time and memory in ways that should have made Proust congenial, but does not specify actual lines of influence.[5] John Foster, however, in studying the cultural contexts suggested for memory in *Mary*, concludes that in 1925 Nabokov was avoiding Proust in favor of figures like Pushkin or Nietzsche.[6] Yet in 1930, according to Brian Boyd, one of Nabokov's friends remembers that he adored Proust and had read him twice.[7] On the other hand, when J. E. Rivers asked Nabokov point-blank about Proust, he was told that he first studied the *Recherche* with his wife in 1935–36.[8]

In 1932, at any rate, *Camera Obscura* (the original Russian version of *Laughter in the Dark*) featured a detailed parody of Proust.[9] This parody is highly suggestive, for though it pokes fun at Proust's involved style and at his fussiness and supposed lack of will-power, it also displays an intense engagement with several key strands in his achievement. Thus Proust is praised as an "innovator," in implicit contrast with Rimbaud, who comes off as shallow and an inadequate model for modern literature.[10] Nabokov also seems impressed with a Proustian synthesis of art and individualism which encourages a rigorous aesthetic discipline of the self while avoiding the potential cruelty of egotism. Thus the Proustian writer in this novel is "very solitary, loved his solitude, and was now working on something new,"[11] yet he is the person who intervenes to save another character (who becomes the art connoisseur Albinus in *Laughter in the Dark*) from atrocious torture. In addition, despite Nabokov's warning in his lecture on Proust against confusing the *Recherche* with autobiography (*LL* 210), the parody highlights the difficulty of such distinctions. Introduced as part of the writer's work-in-progress, it uses material from his personal experience that, when read back to the connoisseur, reveals a sordid love triangle that corresponds to the Albinus, Margot Peters, Axel Rex story in *Laughter in the Dark*. Life becomes fiction, then returns to the realm of life in an intricate pattern that prefigures Nabokov's subsequent oscillations between fictive and autobiographical narratives.

Revelation of the love triangle, moreover, recalls the painful decomposition of Swann's romantic love for Odette in "Swann in Love." Even after the hero's love has ended in this unit of *Swann's Way*, he must face disillusioning revelations about his mistress's true feelings during the affair. Nabokov's love triangle thus involves a Proustian drama of re-interpretation whereby crucial new facts force total revision of the past as one has known it. Even after cutting the parody in *Laughter in the Dark*, Nabokov would still insist on analogies between his romantic lover Albinus and Proust's Swann. Like Swann, Albinus enjoys linking people in real life with the art works that he cherishes (*Laugh* 8), and his love for Margot begins when he spots one such likeness (20), just as Swann's passion depended on Odette's resemblance to a Botticelli fresco.[12]

As the parody ends, Nabokov responds more fully to Proust. For though re-interpretation problematizes habitual memories, it still does not address the Proustian quest for the distant, buried past. This quest informs the famous *madeleine* incident, where Proust's narrator Marcel tastes a pastry soaked in tea and suddenly recalls his childhood in much fuller detail, beginning with his aunt Léonie who used to serve him the same pastry. The chance linkage of similar sense impressions across widely separated levels of time triggers a sudden and spontaneous reawakening of the past, an experience which then becomes the Proustian doctrine of involuntary memory. In Nabokov's parody, a character reflecting on the nature of time first intuits "something enduring, something involving the very essence of time." But then he corrects himself: "rather it was connected with time, like the buzzing of flies in autumn, or the noise of an alarm clock which at one time Henrietta could neither find nor stop in the pitch dark of his student room."[13] The reference to "something enduring" and the substitution of similes for a discursive definition of time show Nabokov's tendency to link Proust with the French philosopher Henri Bergson, who made "duration" one of his guiding ideas but held that thought should rely on figurative language rather than concepts.[14] However, with the glide from these tropes to the distant memory of Henrietta and the alarm clock, Nabokov evokes a Proustian resurrection of the past in its concrete specificity. Though such vivid long-term memories are alien to the shallow, stylized characters of *Laughter in the Dark*, Nabokov's work would soon develop the implications of this moment.

The turning point is "Mademoiselle O," a memoir of his Swiss governess which was published in French in 1936 and which, after many revisions, became chapter 5 in his autobiography *Speak, Memory*. In its first version, it is one of two publications from Nabokov's abortive attempt to become a French writer in the later 1930s. Not surprisingly, it teems with references to French literature and culture; but despite Nabokov's interest in Rousseau and Chateaubriand when he completed *Speak, Memory* in the 1960s,[15] this opening installment of the autobiography uses Proustian motifs to justify his new venture as a writer. Even the accompanying references to Baudelaire's swan and then to Flaubert's colored panes of glass spotlight Proust's precursors in creating a modern French literature of memory.[16] Three parts of "Mademoiselle O" define Proust's significance: a prologue on Nabokov's intentions in writing autobiography, a vignette of the governess reading French stories aloud on the veranda, and a tribute to the soothing light from her door as the boy battles insomnia.

The prologue, on Nabokov's dilemma as a novelist who had taken material from his life and must shift gears to write a memoir, emphasizes that he had used only images, not "great patches [*pans*] of his past."[17] The French word *pan* recalls Proust's writer Bergotte and his final vision of the "small patch of wall in Vermeer"; it also figures in the drama of Marcel's good-night kiss early in the *Recherche*.[18] Referring first to a patch of castle-wall projected by a magic

lantern, it then suggests the limited significance of the good-night kiss. This memory is only a "lighted patch" or "truncated patch" when compared to the entire buried past, which Marcel recovers through involuntary memories triggered by the *madeleine*. As with the glide from similes to a specific memory in the Proust parody, the word *pan* shifts meaning in these passages: at times it refers to a simple patch of color but elsewhere it is a metaphor for a special kind of memory. For Nabokov, when he lectured on Proust fifteen years later, this oscillation between sense impressions and figurative language typified Proust's imagistic style, where "image" could mean either a word picture or a trope (*LL* 213).

This echo of Proust also expresses Nabokov's characteristic preference for psychologies stressing lucidity and deliberate effort. The good-night kiss is Marcel's only memory of his childhood in Combray before tasting the *madeleine* and thus stands beyond the distinction between voluntary and involuntary memory. Because it is so vivid, the drama of the kiss cannot represent the abstract "voluntary" memory rejected by Proust, but because it is readily accessible to the narrator's remembering mind, it can hardly be called involuntary either. Nabokov thus acknowledges Proust's importance for an autobiographer concerned with memory, yet avoids a slavish reliance on his best-known doctrine.

The veranda and insomnia episodes deepen this opening adaptation of the *Recherche*. When the governess reads French fiction to Nabokov, she recalls Marcel's mother reading George Sand at the end of the drama of the kiss. In each scene the listening boy confronts his later vocation as a writer, but the Russian setting of "Mademoiselle O" adds a multi-cultural "Franco-Russian" dimension to the future author's first encounter with fiction.[19] Even more striking are the parallels between Nabokov's sleeplessness as a child and the descriptions of wakeful nights in the *Recherche*. The sense of losing one's bearings in a dark chamber is the same, and there are specific parallels in phrasing as well. Yet the treatment of light sources differs markedly, for what is highly deceptive in Proust (a sick man sees a light in the hall and mistakes it for morning) becomes an emblem of lucid consciousness in Nabokov (the wakeful boy's fear of darkness eventually shows his refusal to accept "the wrench of parting with consciousness" [*SM* 108–09]). The scene thus reinforces the autobiographer's predilection for Proust's oldest, non-involuntary memories.

About this time Nabokov also wrote "Spring in Fialta," his favorite short story,[20] which puts Proustian motifs in an explicitly non-autobiographical setting. Though written when Nabokov was still based in Berlin, later versions appear with a "Paris 1938" dateline that signals a closeness to French cultural models. In one scene the narrator watches the heroine Nina leave for Paris and suddenly remembers a French song. Identified with "some Parisian drama of love" from the last century,[21] the song momentarily recreates the situation of Proust's narrator as he looked back on Swann's love for Odette in the 1870s.

It thus points up the analogies between Odette and Nina, whom Victor has met at intervals over the years and for whom he feels a hopeless but largely unacknowledged yearning. From one perspective, Nina's careless promiscuity returns us to *Laughter in the Dark* and the Proustian inferno of romantic love and jealousy. But now Nabokov emphasizes Nina's latent tenderness and generosity, which have been squandered in exile and whose value the narrator can only appreciate after her death. Thus the pathos of the very name "Fialta," which reminds him of Nina's violets and "the sweet dark dampness of the most rumpled of small flowers."[22]

In this perspective "Spring in Fialta" diverges radically from Proust. Nabokov's narrator defends the literary significance of remembering Nina by insisting that he need "allow only my heart to have imagination,"[23] but for him the values of the heart do not bring the same result as Swann's passion for Odette. Much later, when Nabokov lectured on Proust, he would define the essence of the *Recherche* as the "transmutation of sensation into sentiment, the ebb and tide of memory, waves of emotions such as desire, jealousy, and artistic euphoria" (*LL* 207). But only the memory–emotion interchange sketched in the first two clauses applies to his story. In the third clause, the actual movement of feeling undergoes a major change: desire leads to artistic euphoria not by way of jealousy but through tenderness and love. Clearly this confrontation with Proust bears directly on Nabokov's doctrine of "aesthetic bliss," which connected art to "other states of being" including tenderness and kindness (*Lo* 314–15).

The Gift, begun before "Mademoiselle O" and "Spring in Fialta" but finished later, offers a revealing counterpoint. On the surface this masterpiece among Nabokov's Russian novels appears notably un-European, but in fact it covertly registers Proust's importance. The writings of its artist–hero, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, alternate between strict fidelity to remembered details and fantastic reworkings of biographical situations. This duality also marks his poem to Zina Mertz, the woman he loves, which generally exalts imaginative freedom yet also treats her name as an encoded appeal to memory as the source of art. Thus Fyodor addresses Zina as "polu-Mnemo*zina*, polu-*merts*an'e," or as "Half-Mnemo*syne* . . . half-shim*mer*,"[24] thereby identifying her in part with the goddess of memory and mother of the Muses. Later, however, Fyodor's tributes to Zina become even more specific, for in thinking of her fond stories of her dead Jewish father (*Gift* 187), he goes beyond Greek myth to compare her to Proust's Marcel memorializing his Jewish friend Swann. In thus embodying a Proustian act of memory, Zina suggests the need to revise Nabokov's famous epigram about the cultural affiliations of *The Gift*, that its "heroine is not Zina, but Russian Literature" (*Gift*, foreword [2]).

In addition, a crucial image in *The Gift* captures Proust's strength as an innovator. The novel begins on a moving day, and we follow Fyodor as he inspects a large van in the street, then as he adjusts to his own recent move. The situation evokes the circumstances of the Russian literary emigration, yet as it

develops, we discover that like Proust's Marcel, Fyodor is a light sleeper who finds new bedrooms a terrible ordeal. He therefore reflects with morose humor on the ordeal of "living face-to-face with totally strange objects," including a "malevolent wardrobe" (7, 53). These motifs recall the opening of the *Recherche*, when Marcel shows his rapidly shifting memories of various bedrooms he has used, including a weird one at Balbec with furniture that bothered him much like Fyodor's wardrobe. Yet eventually the unfamiliar succumbs to habit for both Marcel and Fyodor, thereby suggesting an important parallel between Proust's and Nabokov's basic sense of the modern. For if modernity means a heightened awareness of temporal rupture, then it can arise only when the otherness of the past still remains apparent, when the accustomed bedroom still clashes with the new place where one is trying to sleep. Both writers thus assume a certain persistence of memory as the background for any true awareness of originality, yet also realize that habit will eventually dull the shock of innovation.

Both "Spring in Fialta" and *The Gift* may be called fictive autobiographies in the sense that their first-person narrators, though clearly not authorial alter-egos, do write about their lives with the kind of loving detail that marks Nabokov's own efforts as an autobiographer. The Proustian element in both works thus flows quite naturally from the fiction–autobiography problematic that emerged in *Camera Obscura*. Nabokov's next novel, the fictitious biography *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, would seem to continue this development, but because it focuses on an English rather than a French cultural sphere (it was Nabokov's first novel in English), the connections with Proust are less explicit. Still, even though Knight affects the Francophobia of a sturdy Englishman, his library does include *Le Temps retrouvé* (*The Past Recaptured*), the last volume of Proust's *Recherche* (*RLSK* 39), and on several occasions Knight displays Proustian mannerisms (114, 181). In a novel that imagines an English career for a Nabokov-like writer of modern fiction, Nabokov apparently wants to remind us of his recent French interests.

Certainly when Nabokov describes Knight's artistic vocation as a commitment to "self-consciousness as if it had been some rare talent or passion" (42), this formula recalls Proustian aesthetic individualism. In context, self-consciousness means neither discomfort with oneself nor reflexivity but personal uniqueness, and the associated reference to "rare talent" suggests a synthesis between this firmer sense of individuality and some kind of artistic gift. Moreover, Sebastian's English mistress Clare Bishop evokes Proust both by being "endowed with the gift of being remembered" and by having a sense of beauty that is ready "to discern the halo around a frying-pan or the likeness between a weeping-willow and a Skye terrier" (81). In other words, she is open to the duality of images, which can have either the solid particularity of a frying pan or the metaphorical power to make willows resemble terriers.

On returning to *Speak, Memory* in the late 1940s, Nabokov reaffirmed Proust's importance for his autobiographical writing. In chapter 1, to be sure,

his first statement of basic intentions leads to a vehement dismissal of Freud (20). But chapter 3, along with mentioning the fortune that Nabokov received from his uncle Ruka, raises other issues of inheritance and ancestry. By paying tribute to his family's love of "vividly recalling a patch of the past" (75), it reactivates the Proustian image that opened "Mademoiselle O."[25] In addition, Ruka's own French writings (74), his *belle époque* affluence, and his homosexuality all recall Proust; and in the Russian variant Nabokov even specifies that his uncle looked like Proust.[26] A similar sense of Proust's continuing validity underlies chapter 7, on Nabokov's boyish love for the French girl Colette. Moving from the French seaside to a park in Paris, this episode evokes two Proustian scenes of awakening love—Balbec where Marcel meets Albertine and the garden near the Champs Elysées where he plays with Gilberte. Chapter 8, finally, leads to Nabokov's "supreme achievement of memory" (170) by using the extended metaphor of a slide show (the chapter's original *New Yorker* title was "Lantern Slides"). Once again, Nabokov has revealed his fascination with the magic-lantern scene at the beginning of the *Recherche*. Elsewhere in the autobiography, when he praises "the bright mental image . . . conjured up by a wing-stroke of the will" (33), his basic motive becomes explicit: to welcome Proust as an unsurpassed artist of memory but to bypass involuntary memory in favor of a more deliberate, lucid approach. In a similar vein, when Nabokov compared two Russian words for "inspiration," "*vostorg*" and "*vdokhnovenie*" (*LL* 377–80), the instantaneous rapture of the first evoked Proust (379) while the second suggested his own "cool and sustained" artistry.

Stylistically, *Speak, Memory* relies on long, sinuous sentences whose elaborate parallelisms and parenthetical insertions seem at least partially Proustian. Even more striking are the complex images which oscillate between actual memories of the past and a figurative rendition of some aspect of memory itself. Thus Nabokov's portrait of Zhernosekov, his first Russian tutor, begins as follows: "With a sharp and merry blast from the whistle that was part of my first sailor suit, my childhood calls me back into that distant past" (28). In the first clause, the whistle is a remembered object, but in the second, it becomes a metaphor for a mental process—for the abrupt and irresistible resurgence of a joyous childhood. Perhaps the richest image to undergo this Proustian glide between sensation and trope emerges during Nabokov's evolving account of how he sought a new species of Pug moth. Even in the first version of chapter 6 he vividly recalls his boyhood forays into the forest: "There, at the bottom of that sea of sun-shot greenery, I slowly spun around the great boles."[27] But only the 1967 edition of *Speak, Memory* fully exploits the metaphoric implications of this moment. For when Nabokov says that his later discovery of a new species "fits most philosophically into the thematic spiral" (126) begun in the forest, the scene of spinning round the tree-trunks has greatly expanded. It offers, in fact, nothing less than the book's main image for understanding both the passage of time (compare the discussion of

spirals, 275) and its own structure as an autobiography (see the comment on themes, 27).

After *Speak, Memory* Nabokov's Proustian interests enter into complex combinations that reflect his Americanization and perhaps a growing postmodern trend in his fiction. *Lolita*, though called a "confession," must be distinguished from the fictive autobiographies because Humbert's basic experience of love and memory is drastically distorted until late in the book when he realizes that he has robbed Lolita of her childhood. In an early essay, David Jones analyzed the novel's divided response to Proust, which moves from parody to parallel and involves narrative structure more than style. The parallels are most compelling in Part II, where Humbert's life with Lolita mimics a Proustian story of love and jealousy. Humbert himself would have liked to call this part of his confession "*Dolorès Disparue*" (*Lo* 253), had it not been for *Albertine disparue*, the original title of volume 6 of the *Recherche*. Still, if we contrast "the gray and somber imprisonment of Albertine" with the "garish picaresque comedy of the American highway" in *Lolita*, it is clear that Nabokov radically Americanizes Proust.[28]

A later essay by William Anderson adds some brief but pointed parallels in Part I of *Lolita*.[29] Most notable is Humbert's early encounter with a near nymphet, the sixteen-year-old prostitute Monique, "somewhere near the Madeleine" (*Lo* 21), a famous church in Paris whose name recalls the *madeleine* episode. In a Proustian context, accordingly, Monique and by extension Lolita represent misguided attempts to recapture Humbert's lost love for Annabel Leigh; the erotic exploitation of real people has replaced a fortuitous Proustian re-awakening of the past through concrete sense impressions like the taste of pastry soaked in tea. Anderson also comments on Humbert's main achievement as a scholar, an article comparing Proust and Keats (*Lo* 16). But he tends to stress a Keatsian instant of frozen time at the expense of Proustian issues, thereby suggesting a shift in Nabokov's cultural orientation from France to the English-speaking world.

A quite different resolution of the Anglo-French tension surfaces in Nabokov's tendency to oppose Proust to T.S. Eliot. Though visible in *Lolita*, this tendency peaks in *Pale Fire*, whose two main characters hold strong views on both authors. But their expressed opinions mean less than the implications of some allusions that exploit this novel's capacity to create non-linear reading experiences. Weaving between the Hazel Shade episodes in John Shade's poem and scattered passages in Charles Kinbote's commentary, Nabokov reworks three words from *Four Quartets* so as to undermine Eliot's depersonalized, mythico-symbolic version of modernism. Countering Eliot is an adaptation of Proust that pays tribute to his aesthetic individualism, focusing on its devotion to the specific and its defiance of social cruelty. In an "odd gallicism" (*PF* 49), this adaptation swoops daringly between cultures by updating Proust's world of aristocratic salons and the Dreyfus Affair to fit an Eisenhower-era America of mass-market television and racial prejudice.[30]

Ada may be Nabokov's most problematic major work, but for J.E. Rivers it is also "perhaps the most steeped in Proust."[31] Though his article "Proust, Nabokov, and *Ada*" scants the career before *Sebastian Knight*, it remains the best overall account of Nabokov's relation to Proust. When Rivers discusses Nabokov's ambivalence about involuntary memory (p. 148), his fascination with complex Proustian metaphors (p. 147), or the two writers' shared interest in "the existence and the continuity of the self" (p. 150), he suggests the basic linkage between this late novel and Nabokov's reception of Proust in the 1930s. But when he claims that *Ada* rivals the *Recherche* in combining the aesthetics of painting and literature (p. 144), or that Nabokov outdoes Proust in manipulating the memories of his readers (pp. 149–50), he identifies important new departures. Above all, however, Rivers contends that on "the subject of love, *Ada* provides the most convincing rejoinder to Proust" (p. 154). As already noted, this particular dialogue surfaced as early as "Spring in Fialta"; but when both Van and Ada read *Les Malheurs de Swann*, or *The Miseries of Swann* (*Ada* 55), the fanciful title contests the disillusioning lessons of *Swann in Love* and signals the eventual attempt of these lovers to correct Proust.

Though the *Recherche* was fourth on Nabokov's list of modern masterpieces, this ranking should not imply that in the development of Nabokov's own career Proust lagged behind Joyce, Kafka, or Bely, his other favorites. Especially in the 1930s, when he felt closest to French literature, the *Recherche* became a major reference point for Nabokov's interests in the complex nature of the image, in the interplay between fictive and autobiographical narrative, in the artistic treatment of time and memory, and in the very meaning of literary modernity. Whether this Proustian involvement culminates with *Speak, Memory* or with *Ada* remains an open question. But Nabokov's objections to involuntary memory or the Proustian view of love should not mislead us. These issues fade in importance beside his blistering attacks on rival modern accounts of time and memory, especially the depersonalized mythic past of T.S. Eliot and the sexually charged memory traces of the Freudian unconscious. In confronting these alternatives, Nabokov clearly prefers to emphasize "a self-created, autonomous, human life"[32] and a specifically artistic approach to memory, both of which continue in the spirit of Proustian aesthetic individualism.

John Burt Foster, Jr.

NOTES

1. *In Search of Lost Time* was Nabokov's translation of Proust's *À la Recherche du temps perdu*, usually known as *Remembrance of Things Past*, and hereafter called the *Recherche*.
2. Rivers, 1984, p. 137, plausibly argues that Nabokov limited his praise to the first half of the *Recherche* because Proust was unable to make final corrections on the second half before his death.

3. Field, 1967, pp. 265, 86.
4. The reference is to *Swann's Way*, the first volume of the *Recherche*.
5. Sicker, pp. 256–58.
6. John Foster, 1989, pp. 80, 81–85.
7. Boyd, 1990, p. 354.
8. Rivers, 1984, p. 141.
9. See Grayson, pp. 23–58 for a full discussion of *Camera Obscura* and how it differs from *Laughter in the Dark*. She briefly mentions the Proust parody on pp. 41–42 but does not analyze it.
10. *Kamera obskura*, pp. 143, 148.
11. Ibid., p. 142.
12. Compare Proust, I, pp. 243–44.
13. *Kamera obskura,* p. 148.
14. For more on Nabokov's tendency to equate Proust and Bergson, see *Lectures on Literature*, p. 208.
15. Interest in Rousseau is most obvious throughout Nabokov's commentary to his *Eugene Onegin* translation (1964), while Chateaubriand is a major point of reference in his 1969 novel *Ada*. For more on Chateaubriand and Nabokov, see Cancogni, 1983 (and the article "Nabokov and Chateaubriand" in this volume).
16. For Flaubert and Baudelaire in "Mademoiselle O," see Foster, 1993, pp. 146–47, 151–54; for their role as Proustian precursors, see Schlossman, pp. 30–37.
17. Nabokov, "Mademoiselle O," p. 147.
18. Proust, I, pp. 10, 46, 51. For the scene of Bergotte and the patch of wall in Vermeer, see III, p. 185.
19. Nabokov, "Mademoiselle O," p. 166.
20. Field, 1986, p. 163.
21. *Nabokov's Dozen*, p. 22.
22. Ibid., p. 14.
23. Ibid., p. 24.
24. *Dar*, p. 176; *Gift* 157.
25. Nabokov omitted the prologue discussed above in "Mademoiselle O" while rewriting the memoir for inclusion in the autobiography.
26. *Drugie berega*, p. 63.
27. "Butterflies," p. 28.
28. Jones, p. 138.
29. Anderson, pp. 363–67.
30. John Foster, 1991, pp. 58–60, 62–63.
31. Rivers, 1984, p. 142. Hereafter, page references to Rivers' article will be given parenthetically in the text.
32. Rorty (p. xiv) uses this phrase to describe what Nabokov and Proust share as individualists.

NABOKOV AND PUSHKIN

Pushkin died without establishing a literary school and without leaving behind a single direct disciple. His poetic message, if it was understood at all, was soon distorted by foes and friends alike.[1] Nor did Pushkin's aesthetic creed of pure art endear him to the Russian intelligentsia of the decades to come. His journal *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*) changed hands, and its new editors made several attempts to dethrone the aristocratic poet and write off his poetic legacy. In fact, soon after the death of Pushkin, Russian literature took an altogether different course, becoming a utilitarian tool for the promotion of civic, social, moral, religious, and political causes—a change that was to numb the aesthetic sensitivities of several generations of Russian readers and critics. Under such circumstances, the eclipse of Pushkin's sun was all but imminent.

Pushkin did not find a worthy descendant in his own century but had to wait for a distant one in the next. During the first decades of the new century we observe something that can be called a "centennial return" to the Golden Age of Pushkin. The entire pleiad of Silver Age poets, Merezhkovsky, Briusov, Bal'mont, Blok, Bely, Ivanov, Khodasevich, Akhmatova, Mandelshtam, Tsvetaeva—each claimed Pushkin as "their own" ("moi Pushkin"—"my Pushkin") and perceived their own epoch, their personal lives and losses as parallel to Pushkin's life, death, and era.

Perhaps no one at home or in exile made claim to Pushkin's legacy more faithfully than Vladimir Nabokov. Born in 1899, one hundred years after Pushkin, Nabokov adopted Pushkin as his personal muse and never abandoned that calling. This muse followed him in 1917–18 to the Crimea where Pushkin "had wandered . . . a century earlier" (*SM* 244), and welcomed the young poet in exile. An epigraph from Pushkin's poem "Arion" opens Nabokov's first volume of verse published in the emigration, *Gornii put'* (*The Empyrean Path*, 1923). The volume is dedicated to the memory of Nabokov's father, while Pushkin's poem serves as an emblem of the young poet's exile: "Both helmsman and sailor perished!— / I alone, the mysterious singer, / Swept ashore by the storm, / I sing the former hymns / And dry my damp garment / In the sun at the foot of a cliff" (Translation by W. Arndt). This poem had a very personal significance for Nabokov. His father, V.D. Nabokov, the leader of the Constitutional Democratic Party, left Russia with his family after the Bolshevik coup. In emigration he was editor-in-chief of the Russian newspaper *Rul'* (*The Rudder*), and in 1922 in Berlin was assassinated by Russian terrorists from the extreme right. Through the prism of "Arion," Nabokov's father becomes the "perished helmsman," while the son, rather immodestly, reserves for himself the role of the rescued "mysterious singer" cast by the cataclysms of history into a secure harbor of exile. A Pushkin memento also marks the beginning of Nabokov's prose; his first novel *Mary* (1926) opens with an epigraph from *Eugene Onegin*: "Having recalled intrigues of former years, / Having recalled a former love."[2] Thus from very early on

Pushkin became a permanent dweller in Nabokov's art. His presence extends from fleeting allusions to direct quotations (attributed and unattributed), from occasional motifs to entire themes and fully formulated aesthetic concepts.[3]

It has long been established that the central theme of Nabokov's art is art itself. His concept of art for art's sake and the supreme independence of the poet from all societal needs is a direct outgrowth of Pushkin's treatment of this theme in such works as "The Poet and the Rabble," "To the Poet," "From Pindemonti," "Egyptian Nights." The majority of Nabokov's novels have as their hero a writer, a poet. The unsuccessful poet Lensky, at whose expense Pushkin deflates the sentimental-romantic canon of the elegy in *Eugene Onegin*, served as a model for a number of Nabokov's hero–writers who were often created for the sole purpose of exposing their artistic diffidence. Pushkin's theme of "Mozart and Salieri" (popularized recently in Shaffer's play and Forman's movie *Amadeus*) became a blueprint for a number of situations in Nabokov's novels in which we find pairs of rival artists of unequal talent. Not unlike Salieri, the lesser artist in Nabokov's novels contemplates or actually commits an ethical or aesthetic crime against his superior rival.[4] On a more arcane level, the "Salieri syndrome" develops into a direct conflict between the hero–writer and his ultimate creator, Nabokov himself.

Pushkin's lifelong preoccupation with questions of the legitimacy of power, his various rulers, usurpers and pretenders (Boris Godunov, The False Dmitry, Pugachev) find their grotesque refraction in Nabokov's imaginary kings, kingdoms, and revolutions in works such as "Ultima Thule," "Solus Rex," *Bend Sinister*, and *Pale Fire.* On the metapoetic level, the notion of usurpation can be applied to the kingdom of the literary text itself, where this theme develops into a conflict between the writing hero and his legitimate creator over authorship, copyrights, royalties, and post-mortem acclaim (*Despair*). In *Pale Fire* we find the poet and his commentator in an analogous situation. Taken a step higher—from the metapoetic to the metaphysical level—the conflict between the creator and the creature, which lies at the center of Nabokov's "poetic theology," affords us a rare glimpse into Nabokov's own notions of creation, life, death, immortality, and God. These occasional glimpses are far more revealing than Nabokov's quibbling potshots at religion in several works and in interviews, which call to mind Pushkin's poetic blasphemies of the period of his "Parnassian atheism."

The theme of the death of the artist and the immortality of art, as we know it from Pushkin's elegy "André Chénier" or his "Exegi monumentum," is replayed in various keys in the majority of Nabokov's novels (*Mary, The Defense, Despair, Invitation to a Beheading, The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, Bend Sinister, Pale Fire, Lolita*). The otherworldly intrusions into the world of the living, and the attempts to peer into the mystery of death migrate from work to work in Nabokov's art. According to his wife, the "beyond" ("potustoronnost'") was Nabokov's main theme: "it saturates everything he has written, it symbolizes, like a watermark, all of his creation."[5] The osmosis

between the two realms, which gives Nabokov's "gnostic" novels a definitive "spectral dimension," remind the reader of Pushkin's "otherworldly shades" encountered in his early burlesques and elegies, in "The Coffinmaker" and "The Queen of Spades," in the unfinished *The Water Nymph* (which Nabokov completed for Pushkin), in *Boris Godunov* and *The Stone Guest* and most strikingly, in *The Feast During the Time of Plague* which Nabokov translated into English.[6]

In their art, Pushkin and Nabokov shared a predilection for experiment, testing the limits of their genres, and crossing the boundaries between poetry and prose. In *Pale Fire*, for example, Nabokov created his own generic equivalent of a "novel in verse." Like *Eugene Onegin*, in which Pushkin often commented on the very process of writing, the majority of Nabokov's texts are self-referential. Both authors repeatedly entered their work *in propria persona*—Pushkin did so overtly in *Eugene Onegin*, Nabokov's presence was usually more cryptic.

The other important point where Pushkin's and Nabokov's poetic and personal manners overlap is in the elitism of their art and personal attitudes. Both writers were aristocrats with family trees rooted deeply in Russian history. But taking pride in one's ancestry went hand in hand with the liberal attitudes that characterized the best segment of the enlightened Russian nobility. For Pushkin and Nabokov, honor—personal and artistic—embodied the greatest ethical and aesthetic values. Though both men were liberal in their political outlooks (constitutional monarchy in Pushkin's case, liberal democracy in Nabokov's), neither one considered the "republic of letters" an egalitarian domain. Rather, it was an absolute monarchy where only talent, pride, honesty, and impeccable taste were assigned sovereign power, whereas pretentiousness, dishonesty, illegitimacy, and vulgarity were the equivalent of cardinal sins and were mercilessly mocked. Nabokov's witty but devastating replies to his critics, such as J.-P. Sartre or Edmund Wilson, were couched in the best tradition of Pushkin's replies to his adversaries. Likewise, Nabokov's hoaxes in which he mocked, under various pseudonyms, Georgy Adamovich and his Paris followers ("From a Poem by Calmbrood," "The Poets," "Vasiliy Shishkov") call to mind Pushkin's delightful invention of Feofilakt Kosichkin under whose name in 1831 Pushkin fooled his arch-enemy Faddei Bulgarin.

However, the importance of the Pushkinian creed for Nabokov is best perceived in the light of the debate over Pushkin's legacy, which developed in the late 1920s and early 1930s in the émigré press. The polemic put into focus the fate of Russian poetry in exile and questioned the vitality of Pushkin's model for Russian literature in the future. G. Adamovich and V. Khodasevich, the two deans of Russian letters in the diaspora, found themselves on opposite sides of the conflict.[7] Adamovich, the leader of the Paris group, called for a turn away from Pushkin. He accused Pushkin of lapidary simplicity, formal perfection, and a lack of concern for content, and, furthermore, declared Pushkin's poetic model inadequate to express the complexity of the modern

world and to capture the increasingly introspective human soul. Adamovich questioned Nabokov's mission of keeping Pushkin's tradition alive: "[Nabokov] plows up the earth for some future Pushkin who once more will take it upon himself to put our house of poetry in order. Perhaps the new Pushkin will never appear."[8] Much to Khodasevich's and Nabokov's dismay, the Paris group found Pushkin's verbal perfection "suspicious," "empty," and urged young poets to embrace Lermontov's soul-searching rhetoric and the "inelegant" manner of Pasternak. The Parisian almanac *Chisla* (*Numbers*), which boycotted Khodasevich and regularly assaulted Nabokov, became the main tribune for the anti-Pushkin campaign.

Nabokov did not participate directly in this critical polemic, yet he missed no opportunity to cross swords with Pushkin's calumniators in his fictional works. In the narrative fragment "Iz Kalmbrudovoi poemy" ("From a Poem by Calmbrood," 1931), which is a pretended translation of "The Night Journey" by the invented English poet "Vivian Calmbrood" (an anagram of "Vladimir Nabokov"), the nonexistent poet converses with the poet Chenston. (Pushkin claimed that his *Skupoi rytsar'* was a translation of Chenston's non-existent tragi-comedy *The Covetous Knight.*) Nabokov puts in Chenston's—and hence Pushkin's—mouth satirical portraits of Adamovich and Georgy Ivanov, the other villain on the Russian émigré Parnassus. In the story "Lips to Lips" (1933), Nabokov lampoons Adamovich and Ivanov for the extortion of a large sum to finance the almanac *Chisla.* In mocking fashion, the almanac figures in Nabokov's story under the Pushkinian title "Arion," which was to remind Adamovich and Co. that by raising their hands against Pushkin (and boycotting Khodasevich and Nabokov in *Chisla*), they resemble the pirates of the Greek legend who attempted to rob the bard Arion of his well-deserved musical earnings.[9]

Nabokov best assessed the satirical role he played in the annals of Russian émigré literary life in the poem "Neokonchennyi chernovik" ("An Unfinished Draft," 1931): "Zoilus (a majestic rascal, / whom only lust of gain can stir) / and Publicus, litterateur / (a nervous leaseholder of glory), / cower before me in dismay / because I'm wicked, cold, and gay, / because honor and life I weigh / on Pushkin's scales and dare prefer / honor . . ." (*PP* 67).

An intimate familiarity with and appreciation of Pushkin and his time was, for Nabokov, the test of intelligence and sensitivity in a Russian literary critic. On the same Pushkinian scales Nabokov also weighed the heroes of his own fictions. An insensitivity or disrespect toward Pushkin, a second-hand familiarity with him through the "vile libretti" of Tchaikovsky's operas, or a complete unawareness of Pushkin's heritage are tantamount to cardinal sins in the aesthetic universe of Nabokov's fiction, sins for which the despotic creator punishes his creatures. Nabokov skillfully directs the hand of Nemesis in meting out poetic justice.

A failure to recognize the traces left by Pushkin in the Russian language portends misfortune for the heroes of Nabokov's fiction. In *The Defense*

(1930), Luzhin-père sits down to play chess with his son for the first time: "Let's start, if you are willing" (*Def* 64; "Nachnem, pozhalui"), the father challenges the future grandmaster. He loses not only because he faces a chess prodigy, but also because he opened his game with the words of Lensky before his fatal duel with Onegin.[10] Later in life, when the child prodigy has aged, he fails to devise a successful defense against his opponent, loses his mind, and commits suicide. The fact that in his childhood Luzhin never opened that "large volume of Pushkin with a picture of a thick-lipped, curly-haired boy on it" (*Def* 33)—E. Geitman's famous etching—is at least partly responsible for Luzhin's downfall.

In Nabokov's story "In Memory of L. I. Shigaev" (1934), an old Russian émigré converses with a bohemian poet, Viktor, about literature. Shigaev knows very little about poetry, yet he declares with certitude: "No, say what you will, but Lermontov is somehow closer to us than Pushkin."[11] When Viktor challenges him to recite even a single line of Lermontov, Shigaev tries in vain to recall something out of Rubinstein's opera *The Demon* and then excuses himself: "Haven't read him in a long while, 'all these are deeds of bygone days' . . . ." Shigaev does not realize that he just quoted the opening and the concluding line of Pushkin's first epic poem *Ruslan and Liudmila.* Shigaev's death in the story and Viktor's obituary of him—the story itself—become, on another level, Nabokov's death sentence on Adamovich's literary tastes.

In the best passage of the story, Viktor describes the most prevalent of all hallucinations in Russian literature: seeing devils. Viktor's nocturnal tormentors have little in common with Lermontov's lofty Demon or even with the "petty devil" of Ivan Karamazov. Viktor's devils belong to the most delightful terrestrial sub-species of Pushkin's "devils" ("besy," "beseniata") as we know them from "The Tale of the Priest and His Worker Balda," from "Scenes from Faust" and "Sketches for Faust," or from the Dantesque "And We Went Farther" ("Skazka o pope i rabotnike ego Balde," "Stseny iz Fausta," "Nabroski k zamyslu o Fauste," "I dalee my poshli"). These unmajestic, toad-like, and thoroughly domestic creatures climb on Viktor's writing desk, spill his ink, and make themselves comfortable on a volume of Pushkin, thus unambiguously signaling their provenance and hinting at the path the young poet should follow.

Once we move to the professional literati in Nabokov's fiction, the author's intolerance toward his hero–writers who are disrespectful of Pushkin intensifies. In the story "The Admiralty Spire" ("Admiralteiskaia igla," 1933), Nabokov unceremoniously exposes a lady author, Mme Solntsev, for dressing up her vapid novel, *The Admiralty Spire*, in the glamour of Pushkin's line from *The Bronze Horseman*: "And bright are the slumbering masses / Of deserted streets, and luminous is / The Admiralty spire" ("I iasny spiashchie gromady / Pustynnykh ulits, i svetla / Admiral'teiskaia igla"). Mme Solntsev has committed a sacrilege; the sham, as well as the portly authoress, whose every sentence "buttons to the left," have to be exposed. "Poshlost'" or "poshlust"—

as Nabokov renders this untranslatable Russian word into English in his book on Gogol (see the article "Poshlost'" in this volume)—"is especially vigorous and vicious when the sham is *not* obvious and when the values it mimics are considered, rightly or wrongly, to belong to the very highest level of art, thought or emotion" (*NG* 68).

In the novel *Despair* (1936) the murderer Hermann, whom J.-P. Sartre accused of having read too much Dostoevsky,[12] commits an even greater sacrilege against Pushkin. It is greater because Hermann is a talented writer who knows his Pushkin by heart, yet who intentionally perverts his ideals, exploiting Pushkin's art for sinister schemes. The perversion starts as an innocent joke: in Hermann's paraphrase of Pushkin's tale "The Shot" in the Russian version of the novel, "Sil'vio point-blank and without superfluous words kills the lover of cherries, and with him, also the plot (which was, mind you, perfectly familiar to me)."[13] The turpitude of Hermann's joke becomes apparent once we realize that he kills his double, Felix, in the manner of his perverted paraphrase of Pushkin. What is even worse, Hermann attempts to make Pushkin an accomplice in this hideous undertaking. As he devises the elaborate murder, Hermann recites Pushkin's poem, "'Tis time, my dear, 'tis time. The heart demands repose" ("Pora, moi drug, pora! Pokoia serdtse prosit"), in which Pushkin had contemplated his escape into the realm of art, "To a remote abode of work and pure delight" ("V obitel' dal'nuiu trudov i chistykh neg"). It is true that after shooting his double, Hermann begins to write a story about it, but the murderous tale cannot redeem Hermann. Pushkin's ethical and aesthetic maxim that "Genius and villainy are incompatible," which Pushkin put in the mouth of Mozart, are lost on Hermann, the Salïeri of Nabokov's novel. (Hermann's "deed" is more in the vein of the apocryphal story claiming that Michelangelo once killed his model to better depict a corpse.)

Hence, Hermann is denied "repose" in "a remote abode of work and pure delight." Both of his sacrificial offerings, the slain double and the murderous tale, are rejected by the gods, and Nabokov leaves no doubt that the vile artist will end in Hell. It is amusing to note that in the foreword to the English edition of *Despair*, published some thirty years after the novel appeared in Russian, the incensed and unforgiving author returns to remind his hero, who perverted Pushkin's ideal, that "Hell shall never parole Hermann" (*Des* xiii).

True artists do not kill in Pushkin's and Nabokov's universes. More likely, they become victims. Reading *Invitation to a Beheading* (1938), it is difficult not to evoke lines from Pushkin's 1825 elegy "André Chénier," commemorating the poet guillotined by the Jacobins: "Condemned to the block. I drag out my last hours. /At dawn—the execution. With a triumphant hand / the headsman will lift my head by the hair / above the indifferent crowd." The hero of *Invitation to a Beheading*, Cincinnatus C., is awaiting execution for the unusual crime of "gnostical turpitude." The main characteristic of the society, which will decapitate Cincinnatus, is its total lack of culture: "The ancient

inborn art of writing is long since forgotten" (*IB* 93) and the old unread writers are reduced to rag dolls for schoolgirls. It is grotesque that Cincinnatus' yearning for culture surfaces while he is at work in such a doll shop: ". . . here there was little hairy Pushkin in a fur carrick, and ratlike Gogol in a flamboyant waistcoat, and old little Tolstoy with his fat nose, in a peasant's smock, and many others" (*IB* 27). Nevertheless, Cincinnatus soon develops a true "fondness for this mythical Nineteenth Century." He likes to "feast on ancient books," and he has even read *Eugene Onegin.* There can be little doubt that Cincinnatus is the last relic of the forgotten culture in this dystopian society, and his "gnostic turpitude" can be interpreted as an aesthetic rather than a moral "crime" for which he has to die.

The only thing Nabokov gives his convicted hero is a pencil "as long as the life of any man except Cincinnatus," and several sheets of checkered paper. Cincinnatus' pencil is thus the only weapon to meet the challenge of the axe. On death row, a poet is born. Cincinnatus is aware that he writes "obscurely and limply, like Pushkin's lyrical duelist," Lensky (*IB* 92), yet as his writing becomes more inspired, his tête-à-tête with death turns into a struggle for artistic immortality. Cincinnatus expresses the same plea before the execution as Pushkin's André Chenier: "Save these jottings—I do not know whom I ask, but save these jottings . . ." (*IB* 194). A. Chénier was guillotined on the 7th Thermidor 1794, two days before the Jacobin dictatorship fell; the dictatorship in *Invitation to a Beheading* falls at the moment of the execution. The beheaded Cincinnatus raises his head from the block and, amidst the dust and cataclysms of the crumbling world walks "in that direction where, to judge by the voices, stood beings akin to him" (223). It can be safely argued that Cincinnatus is rescued because he acquired and preserved cultural literacy in a world deprived of genuine art, and because of his link to Pushkin's patrimony.

The most prominent place on Nabokov's Olympus is reserved for those who possess a true knowledge of Pushkin. Nabokov sometimes devises literary characters for the sole purpose of guarding this sacred treasure. They may be incidental and outwardly unremarkable people, yet Nabokov depicts them using his most precious tints. One of them is the elusive Petrov in *The Defense*: "His sole function in life was to carry, reverently and with concentration, that which had been entrusted to him, something which it was necessary at all costs to preserve in all its detail and in all its purity, and for that reason he even walked with small careful steps, trying not to bump into anyone, and only very seldom, only when he discerned a kindred solicitude in the person he was talking to did he reveal for a moment—from the whole of that enormous something that he carried mysteriously within him—some tender, priceless little trifle, a line from Pushkin or the peasant name of a wild flower" (*Def* 230–31).

The precious, minor character such as Petrov eventually attains full size in Nabokov's last Russian novel, *The Gift* (1937). Here the mission of preserving Pushkin's creed and absorbing his art into one's own was entrusted to the

young poet, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, who is by far the most autobiographical character in Nabokov's fiction.

The appearance of *The Gift* in 1937 coincided with the centennial of Pushkin's death. Nabokov presented on this occasion a public lecture in Paris, entitled "Pouchkine ou le vrai et le vraisemblable" ("Pushkin, or the Real and the Plausible"). James Joyce happened to be present at the reading. In his lecture Nabokov bemoans the low level of familiarity with Pushkin of the average Russian, whose knowledge rarely exceeds the vague memories of one's school compositions and of the vile libretti for Tchaikovsky's operas based on Pushkin's works. From this gray majority of compatriots Nabokov isolates those few for whom "to read [Pushkin's] works, without a single exception—his poems, stories, elegies, letters, plays, reviews—and to reread them endlessly is one of the glories of earthly life."[14] In anticipation of the hosts of books written on the occasion of the centennial, Nabokov warns his audience about the genre of "fictionalized biographies." Even the most sincere and well-informed attempt to transform a great poet's life into a biography results in a "monstrous hoax," turning the poet's life into a "pastiche of his art" and reducing the man to a "macabre doll" (p. 40). Nabokov shows us how easy it is to conjure up plausible vignettes of Pushkin: "Here, then, is this brusque, stocky man, whose small swarthy hand (for there was something Negroid and something simian about this great Russian) wrote the first and most glorious pages of our poetry. . . . I see him . . . at his country place, . . . in his nightshirt, hairy, scribbling verse on a scrap of gray paper of the kind used to wrap candles, as he munches on an apple. . . . And finally, there he is with a bullet in his belly, sitting crosswise in the snow and aiming at d'Anthès for a long, long time. . . ." (40). The impossibility of reconciling the "plausible" and the "real" Pushkin is matched only by the impossibility of translating his verse: "It is a platitude to say that, for us Russians, Pushkin is a colossus who bears on his shoulders our country's entire poetry. Yet, at the approach of the translator's pen, the soul of that poetry immediately flies off, and we are left holding but a little gilded cage" (41). As if to demonstrate the point, Nabokov read to his audience several of his own translations of Pushkin into French.

Nabokov resisted the temptation to write "The Life of Pushkin," and chose instead to turn into a "macabre doll" the iron man of Russian letters, N. G. Chernyshevsky, whose notorious pen signed the "death warrant" for the "Golden Age" and for everything Pushkin and his art stood for. But the task of writing the life of this radical critic of the 1860s fell to Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, Nabokov's favorite character. Chapter 4 of *The Gift* contains *The Life of Chernyshevski* written by the novel's hero Fyodor.

Fyodor is a beginning poet on his way to becoming a major writer. *The Gift* traces three years of Fyodor's aesthetic education, and each of Fyodor's artistic accomplishments is weighed on Pushkin's scales. Fyodor's development as an artist loosely parallels the path Russian literature took after the Golden Age of poetry in the 1820s, to the turn to prose in the 1830s, through the age of Gogol

and Belinsky, to the utilitarian Iron Age of the 1860s, and through the period of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, into the Silver Age and modern times. In addition, Fyodor refracts this evolution of Russian literature through the theoretical achievements of the Formalist school. This dramatization of literary history and criticism in *The Gift* is Nabokov's most elaborate answer to the anti-Pushkinian attitudes voiced in the last century and repeated in more recent times. Nabokov tells us in the introduction to the English edition, that *The Gift*'s central character is Russian literature. Indeed, "not since *Evgenii Onegin* has a major Russian novel contained such a profusion of literary discussions, allusions and writers' characterizations," writes Simon Karlinsky in the first critical article on the novel.[15]

Chapter One, covering the period of Fyodor's poetic apprenticeship, contains an array of minor and major allusions to Pushkin. Fyodor's name, Godunov-Cherdyntsev, belongs to an extinct aristocratic lineage and owes something to the author of *Boris Godunov*. Nabokov gives Fyodor a nurse who comes from the same village as Pushkin's nanny Ariana Rodionovna (*Gift* 98); Nabokov's mother's nanny came from that region too (*Drugie berega*, p. 37). Fyodor's collection of verses, partially reproduced in Chapter One, opens with a poem about his nanny and introduces us into the nursery of the future poet. All of Fyodor's poems are couched in iambic tetrameter, the measure given to Russian poetry at its birth by Lomonosov and immortalized by Pushkin. Entire sections of the novel are written in verse form, overt and concealed, which makes *The Gift* a generic cousin to Pushkin's experimental "novel in verse," *Eugene Onegin*.

Pushkin's contemporary A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky once wrote that "poetry is to prose as an infant's rattle is to a youth's compass." In chapter 2, the young poet makes his transition to prose. Fyodor embarks on an imaginary journey to Central Asia and China, tracing the steps of his father, a famous explorer who did not return from his last expedition to this region. The apprenticeship to Pushkin continues in this chapter also, for the son's search for his lost father is prompted by a sentence from Pushkin's *The Journey to Arzrum* (1835/36). Learning entire pages of Pushkin by heart, Fyodor absorbs into his poetic system Pushkin's narrative manner. He attempts to bring the "transparent rhythm" of Pushkin's prose "to the limits of blank verse." An accidental iambic and alliterative sentence from Pushkin's novel *The Captain's Daughter* serves as a living example: "Ne privedi Bog videt' russkii bunt bessmyslennyi i besposhchadnyi" (*Dar* 111; "God help us not to see a Russian riot senseless and merciless" [*Gift* 97]). The short samples of Pushkin's prose that Fyodor quotes or paraphrases in Chapter Two are all alliteratively patterned: "Zhatva struilas', ozhidaia serpa. . . . Navstrechu shla Karolina Shmidt, devushka sil'no narumianennaia, vida skromnogo i smirennogo, kupivshaia krovat', na kotoroi umer Shoning" (*Dar* 109, 111; "The harvest rippled, awaiting the sickle. . . . Toward him . . . came Karolina Schmidt, 'a girl heavily rouged, of meek and modest appearance,' who acquired the bed in which Schoning died" [*Gift* 96,

97]). In Pushkin's original the alliterations are even tighter. The sound of Pushkin's prose indeed serves as a "tuning fork" for the young poet during his migration to prose. This alliterative quality is, of course, a permanent hallmark of Nabokov's prose, Russian and English.

During his imaginary journey, Fyodor continually refracts the image of his lost father through the prism of Pushkin: "the rhythm of Pushkin's era commingled with the rhythm of his father's life." Or even more directly: "With Pushkin's voice merged the voice of his father" (*Gift* 98). Thus, Fyodor's sorrow and the search for his lost father actually involve two parental figures. Both missing men exert their presence in an elliptic yet tangible way, best expressed in the words of the invented memorist Sukhoshchekov: "They say that a man whose leg is cut off at the hip can feel it for a long time, moving nonexistent toes and flexing nonexistent muscles. Thus will Russia long continue to feel the living presence of Pushkin" (*Gift* 98–99).

It is according to this bizarre principle that Fyodor physically resurrects Pushkin in the following episode, which involves a practical joke played by two pranksters on Fyodor's grandfather, who has returned from America after twenty years and is unaware of Pushkin's fatal duel. During a theater performance of *Othello* the two boys point out to him a swarthy elderly gentleman in the adjacent box and casually inform him that he is Pushkin.

The refusal to accept Pushkin's death and the attempt to return him to life find their reflection in Fyodor's attempt to restore Pushkin's text. In Chapter Two Fyodor quotes two quatrains that Pushkin allegedly wrote in an album of one of Fyodor's aunts (*Gift* 99). The first quatrain is taken from an undated and unfinished poem by Pushkin; the second one, however, is Fyodor's own creation—a collage of various bits from Pushkin ("Elegy" 1830; *Eugene Onegin*, ch. 3, stanza 13 and ch. 8, stanza 12). Completing the poem, Fyodor fulfills, as it were, Pushkin's own wish expressed in the opening lines: "Oh no, my life has not grown tedious, / I want it still, I love it still" ("Ia zhit' khochu . . ."). [16]

In a similar vein, Fyodor's voyage to China in chapter 2 can be seen as a realization of a dream that both Pushkin and Nabokov once cherished. In 1830, Pushkin wished to join a diplomatic mission to Peking, but was informed that the Tsar would not grant him permission to travel abroad. In 1916, the seventeen-year-old Nabokov inherited a sizable fortune and planned to sponsor an entomological expedition to West China to be led by the famous naturalist G.E. Grum-Grzhimailo. This time Lenin's revolution destroyed the poet's dream. [17]

Fyodor's imaginary journey in chapter 2 can be seen as compensation for the unrealized dreams—his own, his author's, and Pushkin's. Fyodor embarks on this journey by stepping into a picture of Marco Polo leaving Venice. It depicts a ship with lowered sails, shortly before its departure for the Far East (*Gift* 115; *Dar* 132). Fyodor's own situation—pen in hand, in front of the picture—calls to mind the final stanzas of Pushkin's fragment "Autumn"

("Osen'," 1833): "Fingers cry out for a pen, the pen for paper, / A moment—lines and verses freely flow. / So a ship slumbers in the stirless vapour, / But hark: sailors leap out, all hands are swarming / Up and down the masts, sails fill with wind; / The monster's moving and it cleaves the deep. // It sails. Where shall we sail? . . ." (Tr. by D.M. Thomas). Fyodor's imaginary journey in search of his father proceeds, as it were, along Pushkin's dotted itinerary, whereas the concrete geographical details, the descriptions of exotic fauna and flora were borrowed from books of the great naturalists M. Przheval'sky and G.E. Grum-Grzhimailo. Pushkin, too, when writing "Kamchatka Affairs" (1837), copiously excerpted the work of the eighteenth-century explorer of that region, S.P. Krasheninnikov (1755). If one realizes that Pushkin began to write about Kamchatka—a place he had never been—just a few days before his fatal duel, this exotic journey attains a certain touch of otherworldliness.

Fyodor's imaginary expedition to Tibet, from which his father did not return, becomes for Fyodor a metaphysical journey into the *terra incognita* of the "beyond." The journey is begun by the father whom the son joins midway, but the trip is completed by the son alone. As a result of this "being one" with his father, Fyodor has matured spiritually as well as artistically—the young poet returns from the journey as a prose writer of considerable stature. At the end of the journey, Fyodor's search for Pushkin is also completed, and it is now time for him to move on. Thus, at the end of chapter 2, Fyodor leaves his old room and moves to a new place: "The distance from the old residence to the new was about the same as, somewhere in Russia, that from Pushkin Avenue to Gogol Street" (*Gift* 145).

Chapter 3 of *The Gift* brings us to the 1840s, the Gogol period in Russian literature. In his book *Nikolai Gogol* (1944) Nabokov, guiding the reader through the gallery of Gogol's grotesque characters, singled out "poshlust" (usually transliterated as "poshlost'")—the elusive Russian word referring to various manifestations of "poor taste"—as the prime target of Gogol's art. For Fyodor, reading *Dead Souls* in chapter 3 (*Gift* 156) proved to be invaluable practice in detecting "poshlust," while Gogol's art of the grotesque set the example of how "poshlust" should be mocked. Berlin, the world capital of "poshlust," with its indigenous as well as Russian inhabitants, provided Fyodor with stunning samples of this universal affliction. However, even this essentially Gogolian theme owes something to Pushkin (see the article "Poshlost'" in this volume).

Gogol's skill at rendering "poshlust" absurd and his art of blurring the boundaries between phantom and reality find their full expression in chapter 4, in Fyodor's mock biography of Chernyshevski. Fyodor casts Chernyshevski, the nineteenth-century radical critic, writer, and revolutionary, as the hero of a would-be Gogolian tale. The cruel but hilarious vivisection of the darling of the liberal intelligentsia is performed with a Gogolian scalpel. Yet there remains one substantial difference: in Fyodor's art even the most fantastic and

absurd details which one would take for figments of the imagination turn out to be true and verifiable fragments culled from Chernyshevski's real life.[18]

According to Fyodor, Pushkin is Chernyshevski's "most vulnerable spot; for it has long become customary to measure the degree of flair, intelligence and talent of a Russian critic by his attitude to Pushkin" (*Gift* 255). The pure art of Pushkin and the utilitarianism of Chernyshevski represent for Fyodor two antagonistic lines in the history of Russian culture. Pushkin's prophetic 1828 poem "Poet i tolpa" ("The Poet and the Rabble"), written in the year of Chernyshevski's birth, reads like a blueprint for Fyodor's sally against the utilitarian aesthetic of the men of the 1860s, who were reputed to value a pair of boots higher than the paintings of Raphael or the collected works of Shakespeare. Commenting upon Chernyshevski's critical judgment in matters of art, Fyodor compares him to the "cobbler who visited Apelles' studio" (*Gift* 242). Fyodor's remark is a direct allusion to Pushkin's 1829 parable "The Cobbler" ("Sapozhnik"): "A cobbler, canvassing a painting, / Has found the footwear on it flawed. / The artist promptly fixed the failing, / But this is what the cobbler thought: / 'It seems the face is slightly crooked . . . / And isn't that bosom rather nude?' . . . / Annoyed, Apelles interrupted: / "Judge not, my friend, above the boot!" (my translation).

The nonchalant ease, wit, and playful irreverence of Fyodor's lampoon of Chernyshevski link it to the tradition of "Arzamas," the merry club in which Pushkin and his friends, through travesties and skits, exorcised the demons of the retrograde literature perpetrated by the members of the group "Beseda," also known as the "Archaists." For Nabokov, who was a founding member of the émigré "Arzamas," the anti-aesthetic and anti-Pushkinian attitudes of the past had far-reaching implications for the present. In Fyodor's eyes the men of the 1860s were directly responsible for the advent of Socialist Realism in the 1930s, which placed an iron full stop after the Russian cultural explosion of the Silver Age. The invective against Chernyshevski was also obliquely aimed at the Adamovich clique, the "Paris mystagogues," whom Nabokov held responsible for the wasteland of Russian literature in emigration.

Fyodor happened to be more fortunate in the novel than Nabokov was in real life: Fyodor does find a publisher for his book in chapter 5, while Nabokov was not allowed to slaughter publicly the holy cow of the Russian liberal intelligentsia. *The Gift* appeared on the pages of the otherwise very tolerant *Contemporary Annals* (*Sovremennye zapiski*), but without the *Life of Chernyshevski*—a rare example of censorship from the left in the history of Russian émigré literature. As if anticipating this cut, Nabokov opened chapter 5 with several unflattering reviews of the purged chapter. Nabokov's fictitious reviews of Fyodor's book plausibly capture the prevailing mentality of the critics of the day, their cultural and ideological bias. One reviewer, for example, criticizes Fyodor for placing "solemn but not quite grammatical maxims in the mouths of his characters, like 'The poet himself chooses the subjects for his poems, the multitude ["tolpa"] has no right to direct his inspiration'" (*Gift*

302)—without recognizing that this sentence is a quote from Pushkin's "Egyptian Nights." The review by Christopher Mortus of Paris is a brilliant parody of Adamovich's anti-Pushkin musings (*Gift* 302–305). Nabokov's preemptive move in the beginning of chapter 5 reminds us of Pushkin, who in the foreword to the second edition of *Ruslan and Liudmila* reproduced some of the most inept reviews of that work without adding a word in his own defense.

By the end of chapter 5, Fyodor's last work, *The Gift* itself, is born. Until this point it existed only in potentiality, as a novel to be. However, Fyodor's presentiments of the finished book permeate its not-yet-written pages: "It's queer, I seem to remember my future works, although I don't even know what they will be about. I'll recall them completely and write them down" (*Gift* 194); "[a]t times I feel that somewhere [my book] has already been written by me, that it is here, hiding in this inky jungle, that I have only to free it part by part from the darkness and the parts will fall together of themselves" (*Gift* 138). The anticipation of the final form of the not-yet-written work is one of Pushkin's devices most skillfully employed in *Eugene Onegin*, in which the poet, peering into a "magic crystal," dimly recognizes the shape of his future novel (ch. 8, stanza 50). The novel is announced in chapter 3, stanza 13, and in the last chapter Pushkin has his hero Onegin read this very novel (ch. 8, stanza 36).

Finally, not only Fyodor's anticipation of his future book, but also his parting from the completed work is truly Pushkinian. The final paragraph of *The Gift* is Fyodor's final tribute to Pushkin, to his iambic tetrameter, to the Onegin stanza, and to Pushkin's closing of his novel in verse: "Good-bye, my book! Like mortal eyes, / imagined ones must close one day. / Onegin from his knees will rise— / but his creator strolls away. / And yet the ear cannot right now / part with the music and allow / the tale to fade; the chords of fate / itself continue to vibrate; / and no obstruction for the sage / exist where I have put The End: / the shadows of my world extend / beyond the skyline of the page, / blue as tomorrow's morning haze— / nor does this terminate the phrase." Compare with the last lines of *Eugene Onegin*: "Blest who life's banquet early / left, having not drained to the bottom / the goblet full of wine; / who did not read life's novel to the end / and all at once could part with it / as I with my Onegin" (Nabokov's translation).

The Gift, in which Nabokov resurrects Pushkin in so many ways, takes us through a century of Russian literature. Nabokov considered it "the best and the most nostalgic" of his Russian novels (*SO* 13), while Field called it "the greatest novel Russian literature has yet produced in this century."[19] Be that as it may, with this "centennial return" in *The Gift* to the Golden Age of Pushkin, Nabokov made his definitive entry into modern literature. It was Nabokov's last Russian work, and as such it can be seen as a farewell to this twenty-year-long literary career in what he called his docile Russian tongue. Nabokov, whom many compatriots considered to be the most "un-Russian" of Russian

writers, was soon to leave the Old World to become an American writer, never to write another novel in Russian.[20] Yet the American Nabokov would return to Pushkin as a translator and scholar, devoting to *Eugene Onegin* as many years of his own life as it took Pushkin to write it. Nabokov's translation, accompanied by three volumes of meticulous commentary, remains the most enduring monument raised to Pushkin on American soil.

Sergej Davydov

Notes

1. See for example, Zhukovsky's well-intended but monstrous deformation of Pushkin's lines from "Exegi monumentum"—"That I was useful because of the lively loveliness of my verses" ("Chto prelest'iu zhivoi stikhov ia byl polezen")—which from 1841 until 1881 was mistaken by the entire nation for the authentic version and was engraved on Pushkin's monument.
2. Nabokov translation, *Eugene Onegin*, chapter 1, stanza 47 (vol. 1, p. 115).
3. The topic of Pushkin and Nabokov is discussed in several articles and book chapters: Clarence Brown, "Nabokov's Pushkin and Nabokov's Nabokov," pp. 169–208. William Rowe, *Nabokov's Deceptive World*, lists a number of Pushkin allusions, as does D.B. Johnson in his article "Nabokov's *Ada* and Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*." In the chapter "The Chess Key to *The Gift*," Johnson discusses Pushkin's poem "The Three Springs" ("Tri kliucha") in the context of the theme of "keys" in the novel *The Gift* (*Worlds in Regression*, pp. 100–106). See also Meyer, 1984, and "*Lolita* and *Onegin*: America and Russia," in her *Find What The Sailor Has Hidden*, pp. 13–38.
4. Valentinov and Luzhin in *The Defense*, M'sieur Pierre and Cincinnatus in *Invitation to a Beheading*, Hermann and Ardalion in *Despair*, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev and Koncheyev, and Chernyshevsky and Pushkin in *The Gift*, Mr. Goodman and V., and V. and Sebastian Knight in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, Clair Quilty and Humbert Humbert in *Lolita*, Charles Kinbote and John Shade in *Pale Fire*.
5. See her introduction to V. Nabokov, *Stikhi*. W.W. Rowe's *Nabokov's Spectral Dimension* is devoted to the "otherworldly" aspect. See also my "gnostic" interpretation of *Invitation to a Beheading* in *Teksty-matreshki Vladimira Nabokova*, pp. 100–182. V. Alexandrov treats brilliantly the metaphysical theme in his recent book, *Nabokov's Otherworld*. The "beyond" also figures prominently in both of B. Boyd's recent volumes, *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*, and *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*.
6. Nabokov, *Three Russian Poets*, pp. 11–19.
7. For the Khodasevich-Adamovich polemics, see Struve, 1956, pp. 199–222; Roger Hagglund, "The Russian Émigré Debate of 1928 on Criticism," and "The Adamovich-Khodasevich Polemics"; see also Bethea, *Khodasevich*, pp. 317–31.
8. Adamovich, 1955, p. 227.
9. The legend about Arion is told by Herodotus (I, 23–24), and Ovid (*Fasti*, II, 79ff). The pro-Decembrist interpretation of Pushkin's poem "Arion" should be reexamined in the light of this legend.
10. Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, chapter 6, stanza 27.

11. *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories*, p. 166.
12. Sartre's careless 1939 review of *Despair* is discussed in Field, 1967, pp. 231–32.
13. *Otchaianie*, p. 45. In the English version, Pushkin's plot is replaced by the plot of *Othello* (*Des* 46).
14. "Pushkin, or the Real and the Plausible," p. 39. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.
15. Karlinsky, "Vladimir Nabokov's Novel *Dar* as a Work of Literary Criticism," p. 286.
16. Nabokov himself engaged in writing apocrypha of this kind, composing, for example, the final scene for Pushkin's *Water Nymph* (*Rusalka*) or "restoring" the nonexistent French original of Tatiana's letter to Onegin, which Pushkin allegedly "translated" into Russian. Likewise, Nabokov fulfills the promise made by Pushkin in *Eugene Onegin* (ch. 1, stanza 50, first edition): in footnote number 11 to the "African" line, "Beneath the sky of my Africa" ("Pod nebom Afriki moei"), Pushkin promised the reader "to publish in due time a complete biography" of his famous Ethiopian great-grandfather Abram Hannibal. Pushkin began this biography in the first chapters of the unfinished novel *The Blackamoor of Peter the Great* (*Arap Petra Velikogo*, 1829). Nabokov delivers on Pushkin's promise in Appendix One to his translation of *Eugene Onegin* (vol. 3, pp. 387–447). Nabokov's learned treatise about Pushkin's African ancestor is based on historical documents that were unavailable to Pushkin.
17. Field, 1977, p. 96.
18. I have documented and analyzed the sources from which Nabokov drew this true-to-life biography of Chernyshevski in my article, "*The Gift:* Nabokov's Aesthetic Exorcism of Chernyshevsky." See also the article on "*The Gift*" in this volume.
19. Field, 1967, p. 249.
20. Nabokov's alleged "un-Russianness" is discussed by Struve, 1956, pp. 282–86.

NABOKOV AND SHAKESPEARE: THE ENGLISH WORKS

What he thought of him? "Nature had once produced an Englishman whose domed head had been a hive of words; a man who had only to breathe on any particle of his stupendous vocabulary to have that particle live and expand and throw out tremulous tentacles until it became a complex image with a pulsing brain and correlated limbs" (*BS* 119). What he especially admired? "The verbal poetical texture of Shakespeare is the greatest the world has known, and is immensely superior to the structure of his plays as plays. With Shakespeare it is the metaphor that is the thing, not the play."[1] Why he could not escape him? "Pushkin's blood runs through the veins of modern Russian literature as inevitably as Shakespeare's through those of English literature."[2]

The stage is thus set for an exciting interplay—inevitably. No anxiety of influence, no fear even of the "voluntary limitation of thought, in submission to another man's genius," required by translation (*BS* 120). The two passages from *Hamlet* which Nabokov rendered into Russian as early as 1930 are evidence enough.[3] Nor was his early predilection for that particular play without consequences—as we shall soon see.

Translation as such remained, however, an early exception. Nabokov's interaction with Shakespeare took the form of integration—from incidental quotations and allusions to imitations and the parodying of larger patterns and themes. In this respect Shakespeare holds a singular position, at least in his English works, and yet he is merely the most brilliant star among a host of lesser ones that shine in and through the skies of Nabokov's fictional worlds. For all his occasional jibes at T.S. Eliot, Nabokov proves to be, after all, a prime example of the learned writer in terms of "Tradition and the Individual Talent," a writer for whom "the whole of literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order"[4]—with the additional advantage of the emigrant's several "own countries" and the inclusion of the New World. And his awareness of this simultaneity of the literary tradition inspired an *écriture* that takes some of the shine of originality off the more recent enthusiasm for intertextuality.

Intertextuality with Nabokov poses particular problems, not only because he draws widely on various literatures—Russian and English to the hilt, French, German, and American extensively enough to vex even competent readers. It becomes a hazard because it is always part of a pervasive game structure that turns his texts into complex riddles: "Why did I write any of my books, after all? For the sake of pleasure, for the sake of the difficulty. I have no social purpose, no moral message; I've no general ideas to exploit but I like composing riddles and I like finding elegant solutions to those riddles that I have composed myself."[5] It may seem reassuring that Nabokov's compositions contain both the riddles and their "elegant solutions," but, faced with a text that does not necessarily tell one which is which, the ambitious reader soon becomes a harassed detective and the even more ambitious critic a source hunter of sorts. There is thus hardly any publication on Nabokov that has not come up with one or another discovery of a "hidden" source for (or "obvious" parallel to) a particular textual instance, and a great number of studies are devoted to just this task. And if detective novels are popular because detective work can—at least on the reading level—be great fun, it is no wonder that critics are attracted to this sort of task: "In Nabokov's treasure hunts, you are invited to join the fun."[6]

Thus a title like "Nabokov and Shakespeare" might well, for many Nabokovians, promise the thrill of more detective work, the discovery of more sources and textual parallels, or at least the promise of a comprehensive listing of all the brilliant discoveries that have been made. The present essay will,

however, be playing a somewhat different game. As far as the expectation of further excavations of Shakespearean treasures is concerned, the stage has obviously been reached in Nabokov scholarship where this well-worked claim is now yielding little more than fool's gold, whose glitter most easily deceives those in the grip of mining fever.

The real problem is that the line between discovery and invention is often very thin—indeed, particularly with works (such as Nabokov's novels) that are full to the brim with sly allusions, multilingual puns, and hidden correspondences. The question "How much Shakespeare is there in these novels?" is thus not easy to answer once one goes beyond the more obvious references and manifest quotations—as one has to do in order to deal with larger patterns and thematic links. As in most affairs within this universe, it is a matter of degree, of knowing where to stop before sacrificing plausibility in the face of the textual evidence. If as a general principle this seems vague enough, it can be shown to be more precise in practice. I will therefore resort to examples, supreme instances of Shakespearean presence in Nabokov's work that will reveal the wide scope of this particular instance of intertextuality—its varied functions and effects as well as its overall aesthetic value.

Overt parodies and covert affinities: *Bend Sinister* and *Hamlet*

There is no mistaking Nabokov's extended use of Shakespeare in *Bend Sinister*, where the greater part of chapter 7 is devoted to various parodies of *Hamlet*. If I have pointed out that through intertextuality Nabokov demonstrates his connection with literary tradition, in this case the emphasis is particularly strong. This has, of course, to do with the well-known fact that the integration of commentary on *Hamlet* by later writers has itself become a tradition—Goethe's *Apprenticeship of Wilhelm Meister* and Joyce's *Ulysses* being outstanding examples. And as Nabokov makes no secret of deliberately writing within this tradition, what we get is a kind of telescoping effect: first Goethe presenting Wilhelm's view of *Hamlet*, then Joyce rendering Stephen's (the latter being familiar with Goethe's version), then Nabokov referring to both in the commentaries of Ember and Krug.

The method of linkage used in *Bend Sinister* is almost always the same: overt parody and covert affinities. Goethe is ridiculed in Ember's complaint about the inept staging of *Hamlet* in the State Theatre, in particular with regard to the actress playing Ophelia: "She and the producer, like Goethe, imagine Ophelia in the guise of a canned peach: 'her whole being floats in sweet ripe passion,' says Johann Wolfgang, Ger. poet, nov., dram. & phil. Oh, horrible" (*BS* 116). And Joyce fares no better when Stephen, "Fabulous artificer. The hawklike man,"[7] turns up as a "hawkfaced shabby man"(*BS* 112), an American cretin with the silliest of ideas for a *Hamlet* film he wants to produce.

The covert affinities become obtrusively clear when we actually look at Joyce's rendering of Goethe's view right at the beginning of chapter episode 9 of *Ulysses*, where Hamlet is characterized as "A hesitating soul taking arms against a sea of troubles, torn by conflicting doubts, as one sees in real life," and, further, as the "beautiful ineffectual dreamer who comes to grief against hard facts. One always feels that Goethe's judgments are so true."[8] As these judgments are also "true" when applied to Krug, the hero of *Bend Sinister*, Nabokov is indirectly offering a commentary on his own novel by leading us to Goethe via Joyce.

Goethe uses Wilhelm's infatuation with *Hamlet* to criticize the celebration of subjective feeling and the neglect of the difference between life and art—both dominant features of contemporary aesthetics. Joyce was more lenient about Stephen's identification with Hamlet,[9] because Shakespeare in his artistic creation was "all in all in all of us,"[10] prefiguring his own aesthetic of the expression of the universal through everyday individual experience by a kind of writing in which "All events brought grist to his mill."[11]

As one might expect, Nabokov is bent on outdoing his predecessors in several ways: first, by offering two botched interpretations of *Hamlet* instead of one; second, by adding a medley of oddities from Shakespearean scholarship which surpasses by far the few examples in *Ulysses*; third, by presenting the whole discussion as comic relief in a situation full of grief and deadly seriousness. What he retains, however, is the open inclusion of one of his own serious aesthetic problems, whereas the correspondences between Krug and Hamlet (after the model of Wilhelm's and Stephen's identification with Shakespeare's tragic hero, and in the manner of those judgments by Goethe which Stephen found so true) remain on the level of (strong) suggestion. In addition to this, Nabokov supplies strong thematic links with the novelistic frame (some more open, some covert)—links that turn the technical "digression" into a mirror of the rest of the book. As these links become visible only when we look at the hoax in detail, we now have to do just that.

The Shakespearean theme enters the novel in chapter 3 with Krug's friend Ember, "a translator of Shakespeare in whose green, damp country he had spent his studious youth" (*BS* 29), and whose mind is soon busy pondering the "unfinished translation of his favourite lines in Shakespeare's greatest play—*follow the perttaunt jauncing 'neath the rack/ with her pale skeins-mate*" (32) while he is trying to reach Krug over the phone after learning of Olga's death.

Apart from the synchronic linking of translation with loss, and the fact that Shakespeare comes in under the aspect of translation, what is remarkable about this passage is that Nabokov singles it out for commentary in the post-facto "Introduction" to the novel which he wrote in 1963. "In this crazy-mirror of terror and art a pseudo-quotation made up of obscure Shakespeareanisms (chapter 3) somehow produces, despite its lack of literal meaning, the blurred diminutive image of the acrobatic performance that so gloriously supplies the bravura ending for the next chapter" (*BS* xvi). When—undaunted by an

unreliable author posing as his own commentator—we consult Shakespeare's works in order to hunt down the really obscure "perttaunt" (with a winning hand at cards),[12] "jaunce" (run to and fro)[13] and "skains-mate" (cut-throat companion),[14] we find a "literal meaning" which not only anticipates but also (through the link with *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Romeo and Juliet*) slyly extends the significance of the circus metaphor at the close of chapter 4. For there—triggered by the flight up the stairs of a "sketchy little Carmen" after he has interrupted her love tryst with a youth "dressed up as an American Football Player"—Krug's thoughts wander off from the stars on her spangled wrap to the mythology of heavenly constellations and the terror of infinite space while simultaneously dwelling on his deceased wife Olga; and this feat is likened to the daring performance of acrobats, who must conceal the exhaustion caused by their exertions when they are receiving the applause of their audience (61).

This may serve as a welcome example of Nabokov's linking of covert affinities with overt parody; metaphorical meaning is extended in this novel to characterize pointedly the fate of Krug (and Olga)—in Nabokov's three-ring circus of art, Krug must perform "'neath the rack" not only of acrobatic feats but of torture and death, and must do this gracefully (in expectation of the reader's applause). For those to whom this sounds too speculative, Nabokov has supplied a further link between the synthetic Shakespeare quotation and Krug and Olga, for the obscure "perttaunt" is taken up, immediately after Ember's phone call, in the description of Krug's study: "The only pure thing in the room was a copy of Chardin's 'House of Cards,' which she had once placed over the mantelpiece (to ozonize your dreadful lair, she had said)—the conspicuous cards, the flushed faces, the lovely brown background" (34). And a further connection: if the spurious lines in which the cards appear were not—as Ember claims—"in Shakespeare's greatest play" (32), *Hamlet* turns up right after the metaphor of the circus performance to which these lines refer: in the first sentence of chapter 5, a chapter devoted entirely to Krug's extensive boyhood dream. And again the focus is on the combination of clowning and death, when the "gross maturity" of that dream is likened to that of "*Hamlet* the churchyard scene" (63).

If this implies that Krug has something in common with Hamlet, he—as "the most original thinker of our times" (30)—is put on a level with Shakespeare among "those favoured ones (men of bizarre genius, big game hunters, chess players, prodigiously robust and versatile lovers, the radiant woman taking her necklace off after the ball) for whom this world was a paradise in itself and who would be always one point up no matter what happened to everyone in the melting pot of eternity. And even, said Skotoma, if the last became the first and vice versa, imagine the patronizing smile of the *ci-devant* William Shakespeare on seeing a former scribbler of hopelessly bad plays blossom anew as the Poet Laureate of heaven" (76). We can only be certain that Olga, too, belongs to this category once we reach the end of chapter 5, when she appears in Krug's dream "sitting before her mirror and taking off her jewels after the ball" before her

vertebrae come off together with her dog collar, and she undergoes "her inevitable, pitiful, innocent disintegration" (81–82).

When Krug wakes up from this nightmarish dream, the method of bringing in Shakespeare by way of comparison is carried over into his first conscious deliberation. Realizing that on each awakening one has to "create the sense of compact reality backed by a plausible past" (84), what comes to his mind is the following: "One day Ember and he had happened to discuss the possibility of their having invented *in toto* the works of William Shakespeare, spending millions and millions on the hoax, smothering with hush money countless publishers, librarians, the Stratford-on-Avon people, since in order to be responsible for all the references to the poet during three centuries of civilization, these references had to be assumed to be spurious interpolations injected by the inventors into actual works which they had re-edited" (83). This attempt to cancel history according to the whims of individual consciousness would not work, though, because "there was still a snag here"—just as Krug cannot escape the awareness "that his wife had died" (83, 84), much as he would like to conjure up a different situation. This could only have been done by his maker, the author Nabokov, who points out that "he and his son and wife and everybody else are merely my whims and megrims" (*BS* xiv).

The fanciful abolition of Shakespeare's authorship also paves the way for the extensive "digression" in chapter 7, which begins with another hoax alluding to the Bacon theory, the "real" questioning of Shakespeare's authorship within the history of scholarship. Some playful supporter (or ironical adversary) of this theory has anagrammatically changed the legend to the first of three engravings hanging above Ember's bed, engravings which are obviously meant to show Shakespeare at three stages of his career, from "'Ink, a Drug'" to "Grudinka," which means "bacon" in several Slavic languages; the second has been supplied with a legend: "'Ham-let, or Homelette au Lard'" (which turns the author of *Hamlet* into the little man in *Bacon*). As Lee has discovered, the pictures on which the first two engravings are based derive from the title page of a book by Selenus from 1624 which was used by Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence, from whose book *Bacon is Shake-Speare* is also taken the remark "cunningly composed of two left arms and a mask" (*BS* 106; referring to Shakespeare's portrait in the 1623 Folio).[15] Indeed, "the glory of God is to hide a thing, and the glory of man is to find it" (*BS* 106), particularly when the God is an "anthropomorphic deity" impersonated by Nabokov the composer of riddles (xviii), and the man is a critic. But the question "Who is he?"—who is the real author of "Shakespeare's" works?—also mirrors a pervasive theme in *Bend Sinister*, the search for the creator. As many critics have pointed out (most extensively D. Barton Johnson[16]), what is demonstrated in this novel is the fact that the creator is always superior in consciousness to his creations and inferior in consciousness to (and therefore, except in rare moments of vague revelation) ignorant of his own creator: Hamlet could not know what Shakespeare had in store for him, nor what readers like Hamm

or the American film maker—to whom we will be coming shortly—have made of him. These imbeciles are again ignorant of what they have become in Ember's and Krug's accounts, while Krug and Ember are at the mercy of the narrator, who cannot know that Nabokov has turned him into an obtrusive "anthropomorphic deity." Nabokov, in turn, also has to admit that he cannot know. This gradation of consciousness would not be tragic if—on all levels—we did not find a (generally unfulfilled) desire to transcend the limits of one's consciousness: to know who or what determines one's fate.

While the philosophical considerations about authorship motivated by the engravings are presented as Krug's (or the narrator's) thoughts, the actual conversation between Krug and Ember immediately turns to *Hamlet*. In this first meeting since Olga's death, both try to avoid the personal sphere and prefer to talk shop—which means talking about *Hamlet*, for Ember is involved in a production of that play in the State Theatre. The fact that Ember's own translation is used provides an occasion for a jibe at Kroneberg's ("Kronberg's") standard Russian translation of Shakespeare; but the prime target of ridicule is a fascist and racist interpretation attributed to a "Professor Hamm" yet slyly concocted by Nabokov from opinions actually found in Furness' *Variorum Hamlet*. Lee (1967), who first drew attention to this, singles out the German Shakespeare scholar Franz Horn as the main source for Hamm's thesis that Fortinbras is the real hero of *Hamlet*. In fact, Horn praises Fortinbras, but is far from perpetrating such nonsense. What is perhaps more important is the fact that Furness, the editor of the New Variorum Edition of *Hamlet*, was not far removed from Hamm's view that "the keynote, the impelling power of the action, is the corruption of civil and military life in Denmark" (*BS* 108). With obvious reference to Freiligrath's nationalist poem "Germany Is Hamlet" (1844) included in the Appendix, which beats the drum for military action against France, and alluding to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, Furness writes in 1877: "To the 'German Shakespeare Society' of Weimar, representative of a people whose recent history has proved once for all that 'Germany is *not* Hamlet,' these volumes are dedicated with great respect by the editor."[17] As well as this, there is in Hamm's distortion the Nazi adulation of the "vigorous and clearcut Nordic theme" and the "fine Nordic youth," along with the anti-semitism of "Judeo-Latin Claudius" and the "Shylocks of high finance" who have dispossessed Fortinbras' family, as well as the glorification of the masses ("the author of *Hamlet* has created the tragedy of the masses") and of the "sovereignty of society over the individual" (108) that is common to both fascism and socialism.

If this is the dimension of specific political satire, what is probably even more important is the fact that this cruel distortion of *Hamlet* proves that an author has no control over his own creation. Whatever he intends and writes, some later author, under the guise of interpretation, can re-write his story any way he pleases. And, as Krug's account of a similarly crazy version of *Hamlet* attributed to an American filmmaker shows, it does not take the regimenta-

tions of a totalitarian system for such a parody to gain wide recognition; the popularity and dominance of a particular cultural trend—here, that of Hollywood-style horror movies replete with spectacular symbolism ("A toad breathes and blinks on the late King's favourite garden seat"; "the skull in Hamlet's gloved hands developing the features of a live jester" [112, 113])—may be just as effective. And Ember's and Krug's own subsequent farcical versions, which mainly elaborate the fancifully symbolic interpretation of names as they are actually found in the *Variorum Hamlet*, demonstrate the attractiveness inherent in this "game" (114) of letting the interpreter's imagination run riot. In this game it is Ophelia who is the occasion for the witty display of intertextual correspondences, beginning with Krug's account of how the film-maker would most effectively stage her death. Lee and especially Meyer[18] have traced most of the allusions involved, ranging from Greek legend to Pushkin and Joyce—and to Marietta in *Bend Sinister* (which, of course, implies that Krug is a Hamlet figure). What we have here is a kind of dialogue between the literary tradition and Nabokov's own method of linking new stories, and such a procedure in this hyperbolic concentration is naturally bound to end up as self-parody—all the more so, as the reader of *Bend Sinister* can hardly fail to notice this. It isn't just that Nabokov obviously does a lot with telling names in this novel (Paduk "the Toad," after Shakespeare's Claudius the "paddock"; Krug, the German "pitcher," in an Ekwilist state where all are reduced to similar "bottles" according to Skotoma's bottle theory; Krug, the Russian "circle," caught in the circumference of his own consciousness; Ember the translator, preserving in the ashes of his scholarly rendering only a few sparks of the genius blazing in the original). Above all, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is here a welcome playground because so much has already been done with the play in terms of translation, commentary, re-writing, and re-functionalizing within other fictions. It is a prime example of the "orphaning" of the text, however much its one-time author might feel paternal love for the child of his imagination.

Though himself a practitioner of this method in his fiction, Nabokov did not condone it as far as translation was concerned. In the "Reply to My Critics" occasioned by the stir caused by his *Eugene Onegin*, he professes that he was "trying to translate an author literally," even though "only suspicion and bloodhounds await the gaunt, graceless literalist groping for the obscure word that would satisfy impassioned fidelity."[19]

One needs to know this in order to see that Krug's detailed definition by analogy, in his musings on Ember's attempt to translate *Hamlet,* is a precise description of Nabokov's own ideal of translation—"a prodigiously intricate piece of machinery which . . . would, when completed, cast a shadow exactly similar to that of Individual T"—that is, of a certain tree or, in the comparison, an original text (120). But this commentary, revealing as it does a deep affinity between Krug and his author, is again linked to parody and even cynicism. What is parodied are the examples that Ember has just read to Krug. As

Karlinsky explains in his note to one of the Nabokov-Wilson letters (*NWL* 185–86), the "Ubit' il' ne ubit'?" with which Ember's Russian rendering of the famous "To be or not to be" monologue begins means "To kill or not to kill," and the French equivalent that follows is even more explicit: "L'égorgerai-je ou non?" ("Shall I slit his throat or not?") (*BS* 118). Nabokov's own explanation in his letter to Wilson—"The point of *L'égorgerai-je ou non* (To be or not to be) is, of course, the well-known hypothesis that what Hamlet meant by the first words of his soliloquy was 'Is my killing of the King to be or not to be?'" (*NWL* 185)—shows that he has deliberately given to Ember a rendering which is not a translation, but a "hypothesis"—though what Ember detests in "Kronberg's" (Kroneberg's) translation is precisely the fact that he "prefers ideas to words" (*BS* 107).

Yet the other mode of attack is much more sinister: "Could"—so Krug asks himself after his most sensitive definition—"the miracle of adaptive tactics, by the thousand devices of shadowgraphy" in the perfect translation perhaps be "but an exaggerated and spiritualized replica of Paduk's writing machine?" (120). That is, could a perfect translation not be just another "proof of the fact that a mechanical device can reproduce personality"? For this is why the padograph, a writing machine invented by Paduk's father, which could "reproduce with repellent perfection the hand of its owner," had become an "Ekwilist symbol" (69)—a symbol of a political party bent on the destruction of the individual.

Here we can observe how neatly Nabokov links the aesthetic aspect brought in via the Shakespeare "digression" with the political satire and the philosophical dimension of *Bend Sinister*. He even supplies a connection on the plot level: the discussion is interrupted by Krug's glancing out of the window to see two organ grinders. Although they are obviously government spies, all that comes to Krug's mind is the observation that "it is a very singular picture. An organ-grinder is the very emblem of oneness. But here we have an absurd duality" (121). And while Krug is still musing ("There is something familiar about the whole thing, something I cannot quite disentangle—a certain line of thought . . ."), and when his friend begins to talk about "the chief difficulty that assails the translator of the following passage" (109), the "Person from Porlock" in the form of the Ekwilist police is already at the door to arrest Ember.[20]

This clash between individual consciousness and an uncontrollable, hostile world raises the question of further thematic affinities between *Bend Sinister* and *Hamlet*. As it is Hamlet's fate to find himself in a situation where "something is rotten in the state of Denmark"[21] so it is Krug's to be subject to the sinister machinations and brute force of the new rulers. Consciousness in Hamlet's and Krug's world, as in ours, is linked to a body and is thus not free. Hamlet is first confronted with the murder of his father and then with the death of Ophelia, Krug first with the death of his wife and then with the murder of his son. In both cases it is the tragedy of consciousness that the more

it remains in its own circle the more the body it is bound up with is endangered, and the more sensitive it is to what happens in the physical universe the more it is exposed to pain and grief. And there is no escape from this situation, save through a radical severing of the link through madness or death. Hamlet's intense love for his murdered father very early on makes him wish ". . . that this too too sullied flesh would melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew" (I.ii.129–30). Krug's intense love for his murdered son provokes him to withdraw from the world into utter madness. What keeps Hamlet from committing suicide is God's "canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (I.ii.132) or, as he specifies later in the famous "To be, or not to be" monologue, "For in that sleep of death what dreams may come, / when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, / Must give us pause—there's the respect / That makes calamity of so long life" (III.i.66–69). Although he certainly knows what a nightmarish dream can be like (see the close of chapter 5), the agnostic philosopher Krug does not share these qualms. For him, holding as he does that death is "either the instantaneous gaining of perfect knowledge . . . or absolute nothingness, *nichto*" (175), the terror lies in the threat that he might lose "the treasures of thought and sensation" contained in his consciousness "once and forever in a fit of black nausea followed by infinite nothingness" (99)—although he knows that even this is illogical, because before our birth "we have already gone through eternity, have already nonexisted once and have discovered that this *néant* holds no terror whatever" (193).

Where Nabokov finally has Krug agree with Hamlet is on the liberating belief in providence. Hamlet's experience of having so narrowly escaped death on his voyage to England has taught him that "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (V.ii.10–11), and he is ready to face death in the final duel because "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (V.ii.215–16).[22] Krug—within the madness bestowed on him by his God (the narrator as an "anthropomorphic deity") out of a "pang of pity"—is also granted the absolute conviction "that there is nothing to fear" (239). The affinity, however, also reveals the big difference: what with Shakespeare was still a providential "game of worlds" has now become a mere "game of words" (to use John Shade's terms from *Pale Fire*): the Providential presence of the author in the novel replaces the earlier work's belief system, theology becoming aesthetics in a now-familiar contemporary substitution.[23] This, at last, is what is stressed by Nabokov in his commentary: within the fictional world of aesthetics "death is but a question of style, a mere literary device" (*BS* xviii). And yet: if, despite Hamlet's final trust in divine providence, we consider *Hamlet* to be a tragedy—not only in terms of dramatic convention but also due to the fact that the crime of the guilty wrecks the lives of the innocent along with their own—then *Bend Sinister* may well be a tragedy, though Krug, "in a sudden moonburst of madness, understands that he is in good hands" (xviii). The "anthropomorphic deity," after all, does not spare Krug, any more than the inscrutable Calvinist God spares Hamlet. The world of *Bend Sinister* is so cruel

that the conferring of madness on someone who treasures his rich consciousness above all else is bound to look like saving grace. And when, after this ordeal, "comfortably Krug returns to the bosom of his maker" (xix), this can be but bitter irony on the part of Nabokov—especially when we recall that this novel, with its evocation of the Nazi and Stalinist terror, was written at a time when the worst atrocities were becoming known and—as Toker has pointed out—that Nabokov expressed his horror of the "burning of children in ovens—children as funny and as strongly loved as our children."[24] Thus, for all the narrator's (and Nabokov's) reassurances that Krug's fate is mere fiction, the problem of theodicy—the question of whether the tortured creature can really trust in the providence of a benevolent Creator—remains as crucial in *Bend Sinister* as it is in *Hamlet* and within the world in which these works of art unfold their significance.

Hide and Seek: Shakespeare in *Pale Fire*

Although the "Help me, Will! *Pale Fire*" (*PF* 68) in Shade's poem is too obvious for the reader to miss the Shakespearean connection in the title, the extension of the linkage is not nearly so evident as in *Bend Sinister*. This has mostly to do with the fact that the references to Shakespeare and his works are scattered throughout the long Commentary and Index provided by the "editor" Kinbote. Whereas in "Shade's" poem Shakespeare crops up only in the quoted phrase, alongside a goodly dozen allusions to other authors, he is easily the most-cited among the forty-six writers, from Augustine and King Alfred to Cocteau and Pasternak, contributing to Kinbote's display of learning. What we have again in *Pale Fire* in a more extensive form is the integration of the literary tradition—in most cases, however, via the mere mention of names rather than through actual intertextuality (but, with riddle-prone Nabokov, one never knows where one ends and the other begins; thus, the fact that the English Romantic poets are more or less all on Kinbote's list is surely no coincidence[25]). Pope comes up several times in Kinbote's notes (Shade obviously being a Pope scholar and imitator of his style), as does Proust (again no surprise, considering Shade's autobiographical theme); Rabelais, Swift, Samuel Johnson, Goethe, Keats, Baudelaire and Browning are also mentioned more than once. Yet all this pales in comparison with Shakespeare. If we exclude the title reference, he is alluded to on thirteen occasions, with mention of no fewer than twelve of his works. Except for *Timon of Athens* and *Hamlet,* these works come in merely through their titles—*Coriolanus* (*PF* 76), *Macbeth* (104), *Lear* (155), *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and the *Sonnets* (240), *The Tempest* (285), in that order—or by pointed allusion to the trees that feature in them (*Othello* and *Twelfth Night* [291][26]). This, of course, does not mean that observant readers or critics cannot work out further thematic connections for themselves (between the exiled King Charles and Coriolanus, Lear and Prospero, for example[27]). The more substantial links,

however, are those with *Timon of Athens* and *Hamlet*. Kinbote mentions *Timon of Athens* no fewer than five times (79, 125, 285, 306, 314), even quoting the very lines that contain the title image (80), although in his singular ineptness as an editor he manages to consult a translation in which precisely this image is left out, thus missing the quotation (he even misses it again for the same reason when pondering Shade's "Help me, Will. *Pale Fire*"). In the original, the relevant lines (taken from the solitary Timon's speech to the bandits) are: "I'll example you with thievery: / The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction / Robs the vast sea; the moon's an arrant thief, / And her pale fire she snatches from the sun; / . . . each thing's a thief."[28]

There is really no direct connection between this context and Shade's poem—the lines from the drafts quoted by Kinbote (". . . and home would haste my thieves, / The sun with stolen ice, the moon with leaves" [79]) are too insignificant to motivate a title for the whole poem, even if they are genuine and not just a madman's ploy to smuggle in his invented uncle Conmal's translation of Shakespeare—and there is, at best, only an ambiguous connection with Nabokov's novel. As a result, there has been no critique of *Pale Fire* since Mary McCarthy's pre-publication review[29] that does not supply more or less ingenious metaphorical explanations of both titles. In this case, Kinbote's condemnation of titles of this sort is perhaps not altogether misplaced—titles which "possess a specious glamor acceptable maybe in the names of vintage wines and plump courtesans but only degrading in regard to the talent that substitutes the easy allusiveness of literacy for original fancy" (240)—unless the author decides to sacrifice his "original fancy" in order to stimulate that of his readers and critics. And, as Nabokov has done exactly this, all that can be offered here is a rough description of the territory of critical imagination, inevitably neglecting many of the singular beauties and surprising oddities of the artificial landscape.

First, Shade's poem. The title may indicate that poetry can present merely a pale reflection of the intensity of lived experience, with art "stealing" from life in literary autobiography. And as Time is continually stealing from life in Shade's pervasive theme of mortality,[30] Shade the poet is "stealing" from other authors this and other themes as well as his own style.[31] The Shakespearean context of "pale fire," in which the moon is a "thief" because it reflects the light of the sun, also links the title with the many specular images from the incipient "false azure in the windowpane" (33) to Sybil's near-final "shadow near the shagbark tree" (69), and with the many imaginary correspondences from the "pale" anthropomorphic views of afterlife to Shade's crucial discovery that he can understand his own existence through the reflection of "the verse of galaxies divine" (69) in his own art, of the gods' "game of worlds" (63) in his own game of words.

When we come to the metaphorical meaning of Nabokov's title for the novel, an even more extensive game is on. The simplest explanation, of course, is that for this novel he has chosen the form of an annotated edition of a poem;

it is merely a convention of this scholarly genre to retain the title of the poem for the whole, even when its actual text makes up only a small fraction of the book (if in *Pale Fire* this runs to just one ninth of the total, then this is quantitatively not much less than in Nabokov's genuine annotated translation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin,* where the same convention is observed). But as simplicity is characteristic neither of the novelist Nabokov nor of his critics, the notion of "Pale Fire" has sparked a fireworks display of speculation about its relevance to the whole novel and about the interconnections among its heterogeneous parts (including the two "authors" involved). The additional literal textual evidence is slight. In the "Foreword," Kinbote recalls how Shade destroyed drafts of his poem when he no longer needed them, "burning a whole stack of them in the pale fire of the incinerator" (15); and, when quoting the lines from which his supposedly famous translator uncle omitted the crucial image, he remarks on his having "no library in the desolate log cabin where I live like Timon in his cave" (79). Indeed: this comparison is hardly irrelevant, considering Kinbote's actual withdrawal from society. And even when we set aside Shade's poetic gift, Kinbote's unhappy solitary life (once we resort to metaphor) seems indeed "pale" when compared to that of the neighbor on whom he spies and for whose companionship he yearns. Even the inspiration and recognition deriving from his activity as editor is but a "pale fire" compared to the incandescence of the famous poet.

Yet, considering the context of *Timon of Athens,* the metaphoric implications of Nabokov's title only begin to come into their own once we have examined the "editor's" actual performance in the Commentary and the interrelationships of that "Commentary." What we learn there is that Kinbote, who pretends to be an exile from some Eastern European Zembla and an ardent follower of the exiled King Charles II (even to the extent of hinting that he himself is no other than that king in hiding), had expected Shade's autobiographical poem to become a poetical biography of his admired ruler (that is, himself). And even if the "pale fire" of the stories he tells Shade about Zembla were merely inventions (as Shade suspects), through the brightness of the poet's imagination "Once transmuted by you into poetry, the stuff *will* be true, and the people *will* come alive" (214).

Thus it is understandable that he should feel robbed when he reads the poem, after having literally stolen the manuscript from Shade's house after the poet's death (thus demonstrating the truth of Timon's statement); for "Instead of the wild glorious romance—what did I have? An autobiographical, eminently Appalachian, rather old-fashioned narrative in a neo-Popian prosodic style" (296). Yet he soon recovers, to find "here and there . . . especially in the invaluable variants, echoes and spangles of the mind, a long ripplewake of my glory" (297). And he then decides to let that glory shine by presenting his "glorious romance" after all, in a commentary which is deliberately fashioned to restore the loss as "an attempt to sort out those echoes and wavelets of fire, and pale phosphorescent hints, and all the subliminal debts to me" (297).

When judged according to the convention of the scholarly edition as employed in the novel, this procedure is obviously the ultimate parody of the conscientious editor serving the work of another author. Pasting one's own fantasy onto a famous author's poem in order to catch some of that poem's glory—even if it is only a "pale fire"—is precisely the kind of theft that the moon commits when "her pale fire she snatches from the sun" (*Timon*, IV.iii.441). And quite a few critics of *Pale Fire* have seen it that way with various degrees of specificity. Appreciating Shade's poem for its human stance and the many themes and views that recur in other works by Nabokov, and sympathizing with the person of Shade as he appears in the "editor's" distorted commentary, they stress the stereotypical features and cheap sensationalism of Kinbote's "*romaunt*, about the King of Zembla" (296) and nurture a profound grudge against the sexually perverse egocentric madman sponging on a dead poet who cannot defend himself.[32]

The picture looks different, though, when one gives due consideration to the fact that *Pale Fire*—despite its scholarly form—is a novel, a fiction: thus, judged by the convention of that borrowed form, the whole work is a fake, and it is therefore questionable whether the professional moral that goes along with that convention still applies. When viewed as a novel, the poem and the commentary on it form two complementary parts with no one-sided dependency. Thus Alter has pointed out that the novel actually presents "in intricate interplay two kinds of poetry, two modes of imagination," with Shade writing a kind of "Popean" poem and Kinbote a "Shakespearean" commentary in terms of "Shakespeare as the untamed, enormously fecund genius."[33]

Kinbote turns out to be even more of a Shakespearean once another Shakespeare connection in the title has been traced to its source. The "pale fire" can be found in a less concise form at the close of the speech by the ghost of old Hamlet: "The glow-worm shows the matin to be near / And gins to pale his uneffectual fire. / Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me" (I.v.89–91). Stegner, who even thinks Kinbote capable of having invented Shade along with his killer Gradus, noticed this early on but could not do anything with it.[34] Meyer in a recent article uses the quotation as a starting point for her elaborate attempt to prove that "Of Shakespeare's plays, *Hamlet* is the most central to *Pale Fire*."[35] But let us stay for the time being with the title of Shade's poem. Even if Shade had the thievery passage from *Timon of Athens* in mind, the connection with the end of the ghost's speech in *Hamlet* appears by hindsight to be at least as meaningful. It makes good sense to insinuate a suggestion of the ghost of the murdered Shade saying "Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me" through the ghost of the old murdered Hamlet. This would be a persuasive instance of Shade's conviction that there is a "web of sense" behind "topsy-turvical coincidence" (63): the same conjunction of words to create an image, appearing via a quotation in totally different contexts in two different plays by Shakespeare, supplies us with two entirely different yet equally meaningful versions of the title for a late-twentieth-century American poem. As for the

"web of sense": there is more evidence for the *Hamlet* connection when we remember that Kinbote interprets it in religious terms as "God's Presence—a faint phosphorescence at first, a pale light in the dimness of bodily life, and a dazzling radiance after it" (227). Although this is only a "pale light," not a "pale fire," the fact that the "faint phosphorescence" in the pious metaphor is literally true of the glow-worm in the passage from *Hamlet* is too much of a coincidence in a Nabokovian text for it to be unintended. Especially when we remember that, in Kinbote's description of Hazel's adventure in the barn, the ghost appears in the shape of a "roundlet of pale light" (188).

To play the game just a little longer: the comparison between old Hamlet and Shade suggests a further one—between Hamlet and Kinbote. Through his anagrammatic namesake Professor Botkin, Kinbote is linked to the "bare bodkin" with which Hamlet, in his most famous monologue, considers committing suicide: "When he himself might his quietus make / With a bare bodkin" (III.i.75–76). It is significant that Kinbote refers to this passage—"a gentleman should use a brace of pistols, one for each temple, or a bare botkin (note the correct spelling)" (220)—in his own even more elaborate disquisition on suicide. Kinbote as Hamlet would then be taking revenge for the murdered Shade by degrading the killer Gradus in the romance of his Commentary.

If this sounds a bit fantastic, it is only a tamer version of what Meyer has recently suggested concerning the connection between the title of the entire novel and the "pale fire" passage from *Hamlet*. For her, "Shade's 'Pale Fire' may come from *Timon*, but Nabokov's *Pale Fire* comes from *Hamlet:* in *Pale Fire* he both avenges his father's murder through his verbal assassination of the mentality of political thugs, and immortalizes his love for his father in a series of reflections of martyred royalty in history and art."[36] Indeed, we might recall the affinity between the death of Shade—killed as "the wrong person" while trying to protect Kinbote (as we can glean from the bungled report in the Commentary [294])—and that of Nabokov's father, who was shot in 1922 in Berlin while trying to protect someone whose life was being threatened by a political thug. Thus the parody of an annotated edition of a fake American autobiographical poem leads us via the evocation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to the concealed autobiographical aspect of *Pale Fire*—an impressive demonstration of Nabokov's method of combining overt parodies with covert affinities and perhaps (as things have come full circle) a fitting close to my own meanderings.[37]

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NOTES

1. Nabokov, Interview with Appel, 1967, p. 42.
2. Ibid., p. 20.
3. Nabokov, *Gamlet*, p. 2.

4. Eliot, 1953, p. 23.
5. Nabokov, Interview with Smith, 1962, p. 857. [Editor's note: variant in *SO* 16.]
6. Meyer, "Reflections of Shakespeare," p. 163.
7. Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. H. W. Gabler, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986, p. 173. See Begnal, p. 22.
8. *Ulysses*, 1986, p. 151.
9. See Schwarz, p. 139.
10. *Ulysses*, 1986, p. 175.
11. Ibid., p. 168.
12. *Love's Labour's Lost*, V.ii.67.
13. *Romeo and Juliet*, II.v.53.
14. Ibid., II.iv.169.
15. Lee, 1976, p. 109.
16. D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 203–205.
17. Furness, p.iii.
18. For Lee, see Zimmer, 1964, p. 111; Meyer, "Reflections of Shakespeare," pp. 154–58.
19. In *Nabokov's Congeries*, p. 301.
20. See Toker, 1989, p. 178. "The Person from Porlock" was Nabokov's working title for *Bend Sinister*. It is a reference to the person who interrupted Coleridge's transcription of his dream vision "Kubla Khan" and caused the poem to remain unfinished.
21. *Hamlet*, I.iv.90. Hereafter, references to the play will be given in the text: (Act.scene.line).
22. For the significance of providence in *Hamlet*, see Sinfield, chap. 9.
23. Feuer, p. 4.
24. In a letter to his sister in June 1946. See Toker, 1989, pp. 177–78.
25. See Bader, p. 47.
26. *Pale Fire*, note to line 998. See Schuman, "Nabokov and Shakespeare's Trees," pp. 8–10.
27. For the link with Prospero, see, for example, Meyer, "Reflections of Shakespeare," p. 160.
28. *Timon of Athens*, IV.iii.438–45. Hereafter, references to the play will be given in the text: (Act.scene.line).
29. Reprinted in Page. (First publication: *The New Republic*, 4 June 1962, 21–27.)
30. See Hyde, p. 173.
31. See Maddox, pp. 32–33.
32. Cf. Fowler; this is representative of many such views.
33. Alter, 1975, pp. 204, 202.
34. Stegner, 1966, p. 129.
35. Meyer, "Reflections of Shakespeare," p. 148.
36. Ibid., p. 149.
37. These meanderings could easily be extended across the intertextual landscape of Nabokov's other English works. What one would find on such excursions is an unmistakable infatuation with *Hamlet*, becoming evident above all in *Ada*, where "Gamlet" becomes "a half-Russian village" near Ardis Park (35); Van publishes his *Letters from Terra* under the pen-name "Voltemand" (342–43, 367), and Lucette is repeatedly likened to Ophelia, including her mode of committing suicide (386, 394,

494–97). Lucette puts an end to her life because Van loves Ada—on "Desdemonia, where artists are the only gods" (521). In *Lolita* (see Proffer, *Keys to Lolita*, p. 18–19 and 133) the Hamlet connection is established through a short reference to Polonius (*Lo* 150) and then through a metaphorical version of the "bodkin" that was to play a major role in *Pale Fire*, immediately followed by "WS 1564" and "SH 1616," the years of Shakespeare's birth and death (251). Besides that, *King Lear* is made to serve as an example of stability of literary characters (as against the disturbing changeability of living ones; *Lo* 265), and Lolita tells Humbert she is going to practice a scene from *The Taming of the Shrew* with her schoolfriend Mona Dahl (191). The *Othello* connection reappears in *Look at the Harlequins!*, where Iris is compared to Desdemona (21), though she is perhaps closer to Cressida as more than one allusion suggests (31, 67).

NABOKOV AND SHAKESPEARE: THE RUSSIAN WORKS

It was only when he began writing principally in English that Vladimir Nabokov began making massive use of Shakespearean materials, especially in his novels. *Bend Sinister* (1947), his second English novel, refers constantly and extensively to *Hamlet*, and *Pale Fire* depends upon *Timon of Athens*. *Lolita* and *Ada*, while more modest in their references to "dze Bart," are certainly permeated with Shakespeareanisms.[1] Nabokov's Russian novels, short stories and poetry are less dramatically Elizabethan. Perhaps it was the author's legendary touchiness about translation which kept the English poet's presence less conspicuous in the Russian-language works. Certainly Nabokov's depiction in *Pale Fire* of Conmal's maladroit efforts at Shakespearean translation into fictive Zemblan would support this thesis: "A slow worker, he needed half a century to translate the works of him whom he called 'dze Bart,' in their entirety . . . his last words in his last delirium being '*Comment dit-on 'mourir' en anglais?*'—a beautiful and touching end. . . . English being Conmal's prerogative, his *Shakspere* remained invulnerable throughout the greater part of his long life. The venerable Duke was famed for the nobility of his work; few dared question its fidelity. [Conmal is the author of an English sonnet beginning]: 'I am not slave! Let be my critic slave. / I cannot be. And Shakespeare would not want thus'" (*PF* 285–286).

Still, the early, Russian, Nabokov's use of Shakespeare and Shakespearean materials is interesting both as a prefiguration of a nascent characteristic, shortly to bloom flamboyantly in his English works, and as an already significant, albeit minor, motif.

It is important to recall that Shakespeare was an intrinsic, not an adopted, element of Nabokov's cultural inheritance. The English language, English

literature, and Shakespeare were an ingrained part of the upbringing of the liberal aristocracy of early twentieth-century St. Petersburg: "I learned to read English before I could read Russian" (*SM* 79). Nabokov states as a crisp fact that by the age of fifteen, he had "read or reread . . . all Shakespeare in English" (*SO* 46).

During the decade from the early 1920s to the early 1930s Nabokov undertook several fascinating projects which illustrate the range of this interest. These include: *The Tragedy of Mr. Morn* (*Tragediia Gospodina Morna*) (play, 1924); "Shakespeare" (poem, 1924); Translations from *Hamlet* (1930); Musings on Hamlet and Gertrude (unpublished non-fiction, 1930[?]); *Kamera obskura* (*Camera Obscura, Laughter in the Dark*) (novel, 1931, pub. 1933).

Brian Boyd calls *The Tragedy of Mr. Morn* "by far the most significant work Nabokov had yet written in any medium," and suggests that it "still remains in some ways the best of all his plays." He also suggests that the drama "unmistakably aims at Shakespeare."[2] (Dmitri Nabokov, also, in personal correspondence with me, refers to the play as "a somewhat Shakespearean drama.") This work, unfortunately, was never published, and currently exists in fragmentary form in the manuscript collection of Nabokov's work in the Library of Congress.

The Tragedy of Mr. Morn is "Shakespearean" in both small detail and large conception. It borrows from the bard in a minor sense when, for example, one of its characters, Ganus, is disguised as an actor playing Othello; some characters seem to have Shakespearean predecessors (e.g., Dandilio "seems made from the same mold as Shakespeare's Gonzolo");[3] and some speeches seem to echo passages from *Hamlet*. In a much larger manner, too, the play shows its Elizabethan inheritance in its five-act structure, blank verse, and a complex plot of political and monarchial rise and fall enmeshed with the private lives of the principal characters. Perhaps the greatest significance of *The Tragedy of Mr. Morn* is the clarity with which it demonstrates that the young, recently emigrated Nabokov of the twenties was already developing a characteristic literary tone which combines the experimental with the traditional. As he turned to the drama, his reflexes were to cling to a Shakespearean model, in large things and small, while somehow still creating a unique and idiosyncratic work.

If *The Tragedy of Mr. Morn* shows Nabokov drawing heavily upon the form and conventions of Shakespearean tragedy in his early dramatic writing, his poem "Shakespeare," written in Russian at the same time, shows the ways in which Nabokov's interpretation of Shakespeare's life harmonized with emerging major themes in his fiction.

The poem begins with a stanza observing that Shakespeare's "godlike thunder" was housed within the body of a normal Elizabethan man, clad in regular Elizabethan garb.[4] The second stanza suggests that the plays live eternally and Shakespeare through them: ". . . your phantasm's echoes / still vibrate for us: your Venetian Moor / his anguish; Falstaff's visage, like an udder

/ with pasted-on mustache; the raging Lear . . . / You are among us, you're alive. . . ."

But the true identity of the bard is "submerged," and the plays were perhaps not written by "that Shakespeare—Will—who played the Ghost in *Hamlet*, / who lived in pubs. . . ." (It is ironic that Nabokov's nemesis Freud was also inclined towards anti-Stratfordianism!) The penultimate third stanza imagines Shakespeare in Italy and calls upon him to "reveal yourself, god of iambic thunder, / you hundred-mouthed, unthinkably great bard!" The final lines depict the dramatist vanishing, smiling, his identity still a secret, his "supremacy . . . unblemished."

In this poem, Nabokov develops, through Shakespearean biography, two of his perennial themes. Exploiting the mythic issue of the true identity of the author of the plays, Nabokov evokes the illusory nature of human life, the often dreamlike and fantastic quality of the individual human being. We are reminded of all his wildly unreliable narrators, the puppets of *Invitation to a Beheading*, the ghosts of *Transparent Things*. But set against the dreamlike illusion of individual existence is the reality and durability of literary art. We will never know Shakespeare the man, the poem asserts, but we will never forget the Shakespeare canon. Shakespeare was more alive in the poetry of *Hamlet* than on the streets of sixteenth-century London. As Samuel Schoenbaum, the leading contemporary historian of Shakespearean biography has noted, studies of the dramatist's life have often been a mirror of the preoccupations of the biographers.[5] Certainly, Nabokov's poetic interpretation justifies this conclusion. The emphasis on the primacy, "reality," and eternality of art, and the transitory, illusive quality of human existence is pure Nabokov.

A continuing fascination with Shakespeare is demonstrated by Nabokov's never-completed project to translate *Hamlet* into Russian. In 1930–31, he published three excerpts from this projected translation, two in *Rul'* and one in *Le Mois*.[6] It was perhaps this effort which made Nabokov so sensitive to what he judged the woeful inadequacies of Pasternak's 1941 translation, which he termed "vulgar and illiterate" (*SL* 470). Pasternak was something of a Conmal when it came to the relationship between Shakespearean text and translator. Eleanor Rowe recounts the story that when Pasternak was once charged with a string of inaccuracies in his text, he shrugged off criticism by affirming "What difference does it make? Shakespeare and I—we're both geniuses, aren't we?"[7]

The three translated passages Nabokov published were Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy (a speech to which Nabokov made frequent reference in later works such as *Bend Sinister* and *Pale Fire*), Gertrude's speech in IV, vii, narrating the watery death of Ophelia (a scene with strong echoes in the death of Aqua Veen in *Ada*), and the section of act 5, scene 1, in which Laertes and Hamlet tussle in Ophelia's grave.

In the Nabokov archives formerly kept in the Montreux Palace Hotel in Switzerland (now, for the most part, transferred to the Berg Collection in the

New York Public Library) a somewhat greater portion of the translation of *Hamlet* is recorded on twenty-five sides of Nabokovian note cards.[8] These selections also include some material from the play-within-the-play, a section of the work one would assume would intrigue as self-conscious an artificer as Nabokov. Another card, presumably from this same period, contains some additional material on Gertrude. On side 1 are some lines (in English) of Nabokov-imagined speculation by Hamlet about his mother ("My good mother? Well, she had one remarkable capacity—to forget") and on side 2, what appear to be some more directly Nabokovian comments ("She bridges life and eternity by means of a comfortable platitude, and with a pout of mature petulance makes a coquettish trochee of 'Wittenberg'.") One regrets that the speculations never evolved into one of the "Lectures on Literature," and the complete translation never hatched. It is to be hoped that some of this material may yet be published, perhaps under the aegis of Dmitri Nabokov, as part of the ongoing project of posthumous completion of the archival Nabokov *oeuvre*.

At the same time he was working on the *Hamlet* translations and publishing them, Nabokov was also creating the novel which was titled *Kamera obskura* in Russian, *Camera Obscura* in its first English-language edition, and subsequently *Laughter in the Dark*. This novel affords an interesting illustration of the way in which Nabokov utilized Shakespearean allusions to heighten the themes and enrich the texture of his major prose works.

Just after the hero of *Laughter in the Dark*, Albinus, discovers that his girl friend Margot has been cheating on him with the diabolic artist Axel Rex, Margot exclaims to Albinus: "'Please, shoot me, do,'" she said. "'It will be just like that play we saw, with the nigger and the pillow, and I'm just as innocent as she was'" (*Laugh* 226). (The published Russian text is very similar, but not precisely the same: "'No eto budet to zhe samoe, kak eta p'esa, kotoruiu my videli, s chernokozhim, s podushkoi'" (*Kamera obskura,* p. 155); the *Othello* citation certainly remains clear.)

It would be over-reading *Laughter in the Dark* to find in it a consistent pattern of parody of *Othello*, but it would be naive to ignore Nabokov's awareness of the ways in which this work is a grotesque reflection of Shakespeare's play. Margot's comparison of herself to Desdemona and of Albinus to Othello is ironically inapt, to say the least. Where Shakespeare's hero is a black man, Nabokov's has a name which suggests a kind of insipid whiteness. ("Albinus" from "albino" or Latin "albus" = "white." Axel Rex, too, is exceptionally pallid, "dull white as if coated with a thin layer of powder" [32]).

The plot of *Laughter in the Dark*, like that of *Othello*, focuses upon two men and one woman, ensnared together in a web of sexual misunderstanding, treachery, and jealousy. But where Shakespeare's play involves the false suspicion of sexual deception, Nabokov's novel is based upon an exactly opposite twist: Albinus believes Margot is true to him (even after his initial

doubts) and is blind to her relationship with Rex. Where Iago torments Othello with untrue accusations of infidelity, Rex torments Albinus with equally false assurances of Margot's sexual faithfulness.

A final ironic contrast between these two works involves their conclusions. Shakespeare ends *Othello* with the Moor's murder of his wife, followed by his own suicide. Albinus tries to imitate Shakespeare's conclusion ("the nigger and the pillow") but can't pull it off. Blinded, he attempts to shoot the unfaithful Margot, but she shoots him instead.

Laughter in the Dark is, as its title suggests, one of Nabokov's more sardonic works. The hint of a parodic literary relationship with Shakespeare's tragedy of misguided nobility adds another layer of ironic self-consciousness to the novel.

This brief essay is in no way a comprehensive survey of Nabokov's use of Shakespeare in his Russian works. Other works and other approaches would yield equally interesting results. To cite just a few other intriguing possibilities: for example, at age fifteen, Nabokov wrote a "short and terrible lyric . . . with a motto from *Romeo and Juliet*."[9] It would be fascinating to trace which Shakespearean works dominate Nabokov's writings at various periods of his development. Certain works were perennial favorites, most especially *Hamlet*, but others, such as *The Tempest*, *King Lear*, *Timon of Athens* and *Romeo and Juliet* seem to reflect distinct stages in his sensibility and compositional interests.

Throughout Nabokov's years as a Russian author, Shakespeare and Shakespeare's works are a recurrent motif especially, logically enough, in the plays. *The Waltz Invention*, for example, features a character named Viola Trance, "a smart woman of 30 in black masculine dress Shakespearean-masquerade style," echoing Viola of *Twelfth Night* who disguises herself as the boy Cesario. The dialogue includes Shakespearean echoes such as Bump's parody of Richard III: "What mountain? Where is the mountain? A kingdom for a pair of glasses." In *The Event* (in *The Man From the U.S.S.R. and Other Plays*), there are references to *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*. *The Grand-dad*, another early play, toys with *Romeo and Juliet*.

Dmitri Nabokov's list of "things I love about the story" appended to "The Enchanter," the proto-*Lolita*, includes a "Shakespearean clown of a night porter." Indeed, "The Enchanter" is a fine place to end a discussion of Nabokov's uses of Shakespeare in his Russian works. Like that fog-shrouded bridge in *Bend Sinister*, or the magic bog that begins in Russia and ends in Colorado in *Speak, Memory*, one can wander into "The Enchanter" and wander out in *Lolita*. As that early story nears its conclusion, Nabokov cites, at a moment of pathos, one of the most pathetic scenes in Shakespeare and, perhaps, all of English literature (at least outside Dickens). The passage from *King Lear* is: "Come, let's away to prison; / We two alone will sing, like birds

i' the cage: / When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down / And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live, / And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh / At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues / Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too, / Who loses and who wins; who's in and who's out / And take upon's the mystery of things / As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out / In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones / That ebb and flow by the moon" (V. iii. 8–19). In "The Enchanter": "Thus they would live on—laughing, reading books, marveling at gilded fireflies, talking of the flowering walled prison of the world, and he would tell her tales and she would listen, his little Cordelia, and nearby the sea would breathe beneath the moon" (p. 57).

But enough: the encyclopedic catalogue threatens to overwhelm the selective sketchbook. My goal has been to suggest the depth and range of Nabokov's engagement with Shakespeare and his works at the beginning of his professional career. In poetry and prose, fiction and non-fiction, Nabokov returns over and over to what he was later to call "the charm of tragic genius, the charm of Shakespeare . . ." ("The Tragedy of Tragedy," p. 341).

Samuel Schuman

NOTES

1. See Alter, 1975; Berberova, "The Mechanics of *Pale Fire*"; Begnal; Cohen; Feuer; Jackson; Hyde; D. Barton Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*; Lee, 1976; McCarthy, 1962; Rothman; Schuman, 1976, 1991; Seidel. References to Shakespeare employ *The Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. W. J. Craig, the edition utilized by Nabokov. [Editor's note: see also "Nabokov and Shakespeare: The English Works" in this volume.]
2. Boyd, 1990, pp. 222–26. The following paragraphs depend upon Boyd's description of the ms.
3. Ibid., p. 225.
4. Nabokov, "Shakespeare." Trans. Dmitri Nabokov. (The author has also used a photocopy of this edition of the poem incorporating unpublished corrections by the translator.)
5. Schoenbaum.
6. *Rul'* (October 19 and November 23, 1930), *Le Mois* 6 (June/July, 1931, page 143), see Boyd, 1990, p. 362; Nabokov, Archives. (The Nabokov archives were visited in Montreux, Switzerland, in 1990. Much of this material is now in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library. The author is grateful to the NEH for funding this research and to Dmitri and the late Véra Nabokov for their cordiality and assistance.)
7. Eleanor Rowe, p. 158.
8. Nabokov, Archives.
9. Boyd, 1990, p. 111.

NABOKOV AND TOLSTOY

American readers may question the need to examine Nabokov's relationship with Tolstoy. Nabokov, they might argue, helped bring postmodern fiction into being, and postmodernists have rarely concealed their impatience with overly long, insistently didactic nineteenth-century novels. Witness the sardonic minimalism of Donald Barthelme's "At the Tolstoy Museum," with its tongue-in-cheek diagram of "The Anna-Vronsky Pavilion" and its oppressive sense of "Tolstoy's moral authority," which the architect has conveyed by designing a building that seems "about to fall on you."[1] From a postmodern viewpoint it might seem obvious that when *Ada* opens by scrambling *Anna Karenin*'s famous first sentence about happy and unhappy families,[2] it reveals just which author Nabokov meant to criticize when he insisted that "reality" is relative and should always appear in quotation marks (*SO* 118). If French new novelists like Robbe-Grillet could attack literary realism by arguing about Balzac, surely Nabokov must have felt the same need to reject Tolstoy.

Russian readers know that nothing could be further from the truth, that despite the upheavals which separated Nabokov from the world of *Anna Karenin*, he tenaciously sought to minimize them. To be sure, some nineteenth-century Russian classics were vastly overrated in his view, most notoriously Dostoevsky. But he did rank Tolstoy with Pushkin and Chekhov as an author who still kept "the glamour and thrill" that he had experienced on reading him as a youth (*SO* 43). Not that Nabokov admired all of Tolstoy's fiction: he claimed to "detest *Resurrection* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*," and even had reservations about *War and Peace* (*SO* 147–48). It is also clear, as Green has argued, that a novel like *Lolita* differs sharply from Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* in its assumptions about the nature of good art and how it communicates with its audience.[3] Still, Nabokov did consider *Anna Karenin* to be "the supreme masterpiece of nineteenth-century literature" (*SO* 147). In the mid-1950s, in an effort to make this novel more accessible to English readers, he even planned a translation with notes, commentaries, and introductions that might have rivalled his monumental *Eugene Onegin* project (*NWL* 285).[4]

Despite the scale of this undertaking, moreover, it should not be assumed that Nabokov regarded Tolstoy as simply a nineteenth-century Russian classic. After all, *Anna*'s author did live until 1910; and news of his death appears as a key, climactic event in *Speak, Memory* (207–208). There it resonates in a complex way that implies not just ends but beginnings: if it portends "apocalyptic disasters" for a Russia that would vanish in 1917, it also coincides with the young Nabokov's asking his father about the facts of life, and thus marks a turning point in the maturation of the future writer. Also, as Elizabeth Beaujour comments,[5] the reported conversation shifts rapidly among English, French, and Russian, thus heralding Nabokov's multilingualism as an author. At a later date, Nabokov took a more scholarly view of Tolstoy's contemporaneity, for when he taught an advanced course on the

Modernist Movement in Russian Literature, it began with the later Tolstoy's "Death of Ivan Ilyich" and the posthumously published *Hadji-Murat*.[6] Outside Russia, moreover, despite Lukács's arguments for viewing him as the canonical realist, Tolstoy was a powerful cultural force during the formative years of early twentieth-century modernism. Thus McLean has noted his importance for Marcel Proust and James Joyce, above all as a "giant" who encouraged them to write ambitious novels that united "dimensions and quality."[7] Both of these writers, in turn, would be crucial for Nabokov as he worked out his own conception of modern fiction.[8]

Postmodern attitudes notwithstanding, then, when *Ada* opens by mishandling *Anna*, it does not target Tolstoy. As Nabokov has stressed in discussing the passage, he meant to ridicule "mistranslations of Russian classics" at the hands of "pretentious and ignorant versionists" (*Ada* 591). In other words, the real issue for Nabokov involves how to overcome the obstacles to understanding this particular great Russian writer. Though Tolstoy differs from Pushkin in being better known abroad and from Dostoevsky (in Nabokov's view) in deserving his fame, his significance has too often been distorted or trivialized.

Research on Nabokov's connections with Tolstoy has been relatively sparse despite his strong expressions of admiration. Yet Nabokov, who claimed to know "when a sentence I compose happens to resemble in cut or intonation" any work that he has loved or detested, has stated that he had read "all Tolstoy in Russian . . . by the age of 14 or 15" (*SO* 46). Given this intensity and detail of involvement, it is clear that there are vast possibilities for stylistic echoes, passing allusions, or meaningful revisions. In fact, a full account of Nabokov's Tolstoy connection might valuably enlarge our sense of his Russian heritage. The more limited treatment undertaken here covers only those references which generate the most notable perspectives on Tolstoy's work, thus living up to Nabokov's claim that "a passing allusion" can become "an adventurous sail descried on the horizon" (*Pnin* 41)

To date, the fullest discussions have been Hyde's analysis of Tolstoy's role in *Laughter in the Dark* and Barabtarlo's commentary on the so-called "Tolstoy Theme" in *Pnin*. Hyde draws attention to several pointed allusions, the most obvious one involving an actress with the stage name Dorianna Karenina, who plays opposite the heroine Margot in a movie financed by Margot's lover Albinus and decisively reveals her lack of talent. Despite her alias, Dorianna disclaims all knowledge of Tolstoy, whose name she twists into "Doll's Toy" (*Laugh* 191). This flip comment points up the chasm between novels and movies as hegemonic cultural forms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But for Hyde it shows Nabokov's essential solidarity with Tolstoy as a moralist, despite the differences in their historical situations: "Adultery has become the toy of doll-like Margot, her film sequence a vulgar travesty of Tolstoy's concern with the family as the basis of morality."[9]

With a similar sense of disastrous decline, Nabokov had previously alluded to a film of Tolstoy's funeral while describing the birth of Albinus's daughter Irma (*Laugh* 18). The cross-reference is eloquent, for later she will suffer even more than Anna's son Seriozha from her parents' broken marriage. Here Hyde's analysis could be extended to the cruel scene where Irma catches pneumonia at an open window while looking for her father (*Laugh* 158–160), which contrasts with Seriozha's longing for his mother just before she surprises him with a visit (*Anna Karenina* 476–79). Similarly, if Irma's death leads Albinus to consider reconciliation with his wife (177), thus paralleling the effect of Anna's illness on Karenin midway through Tolstoy's novel (373–78), in Nabokov this momentary generosity vanishes more rapidly and unambiguously (179). Yet ultimately the interplay with *Anna Karenin* remains somewhat limited. Because *Laughter in the Dark* does not have Tolstoy's "framework of Christian ethics" and because it seems "schematic and abstract" due to its relative lack of descriptive detail, Hyde must posit a more complex linkage between the two authors. Despite the explicit references to *Anna Karenin*, *Laughter in the Dark* "resembles more closely one of Tolstoy's late parables translated from an ethical to an esthetic frame." To support this point, Hyde stresses analogies with the stark sexual drama of "The Devil."[10]

In his notes to *Pnin*, Barabtarlo points out the Tolstoyan interests that its professor-hero shares with his author. In 1953–54 Pnin studies the cultural history of old Russia, using a Soviet compilation that is "mainly devoted to Tolstoyana" (*Pnin* 66); in the same years Nabokov was working with the equivalent *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* (*Literary Heritage*) volumes for his commentary on *Anna Karenin*.[11] Later, during Victor Wind's visit, Pnin caters to the boy's imagined love of sports by drawing on Tolstoy to discuss tennis (105–106). Finally, at Cook's Castle, he can converse learnedly about problems of time in *Anna Karenin* (122, 129–30). In all three cases, Barabtarlo shows, Nabokov has reworked his own research to produce a "Tolstoy Theme" that is "charged with cross-references."[12]

Yet this rich heritage, it should be noted, does not seem to affect the dismaying world of institutionalized education within which Nabokov's hero must make his living. Thus *Pnin*'s first allusion to Tolstoy involves a student who wants to read "'Anna Karamazov' in the original" (10). This grotesque medley of names comes full circle when Pnin recalls his college president's praise for "Russia—the country of Tolstoy, Stanislavski, Raskolnikov, and other great and good men" (136). If in *Laughter* the barrier to acknowledging Tolstoy had been the media-driven mass culture to which Margot aspires, in *Pnin*—to return to *Ada*'s epithets about inept translations—the ignorance has become more pretentious. People may desire culture at the level of Pnin's loving research, but often they are presented with careless substitutes, like the college president's glib summary.

In both *Laughter* and *Pnin* Tolstoy functions as an ironic mirage of significant value in mass-cultural or middle-brow settings that trivialize the

Russian classics. A tribute that is at once more personal and closer to the Russian context runs through *Speak, Memory*, in episodic sketches of Nabokov's first Russian tutor, V.M. Zhernosekov. Not only does this radical schoolmaster share Nabokov's devotion for his father, but he is the person who first taught him to write in Russian (28). Later, in a cameo appearance during Nabokov's account of his first poem, he will also figure in the boy's crucial premonition of "cosmic synchronization" (218–19). In formal terms, meanwhile, Zhernosekov has served as a kind of mnemonic stepping stone for two vivid pictures of the family past. In chapter 1 he plans the festivities when the elder Nabokov returns home after imprisonment for signing the Vyborg Manifesto, which protested the Tsar's dissolution of the Russian Parliament in 1906 (28–30). Then in chapter 8 Zhernosekov helps introduce the hallucinatory scene of the Nabokov family seated beneath the trees at Vyra (154, 171). At one point Nabokov identifies this key figure with Tolstoy. When visiting Zhernosekov's lodgings he notices "a so-called 'typographical' portrait of Tolstoy," made from the text of "Master and Man," then comments that Tolstoy's face looks like the schoolmaster's (154).[13] As a result, it is not surprising that both of these powerful family memories should suggest crucial links between Nabokov and Tolstoy.

Specification of "Master and Man" supports Hyde's point that Nabokov has major affinities with Tolstoy's late parables as well as with *Anna*. In this case, within the autobiography's represented world of pre-Revolutionary Russia, the allusion includes a rare political gesture. For Nabokov's sympathetic portrait of his "delightful teacher" (*SM* 28), the "admirable and unforgettable" Zhernosekov (154), commemorates a potential but finally unsuccessful non-communist front against the tsar. The alliance joins peasant populists like the schoolmaster with renegade aristocrats like the elder Nabokov, both of whom opposed the autocracy only to be imprisoned under Lenin (*SM* 29, 176). The "typographical portrait" of Tolstoy presides over this politics. For Tolstoy was a renegade aristocrat turned peasant populist, while in the same spirit "Master and Man" depicted a master who belatedly learned compassion for a hired hand. For Zhernosekov at least the story deserves its icon-like status because it powerfully evokes solidarity with the people.

Sharply reversing this populism, Nabokov's lectures on *Anna* deplore Tolstoy's "ethical and pedagogical" side (*LRL* 140), and even imply that the novel's scenes about agrarian issues are "extremely tedious" (143). In effect these comments take back the Zhernosekov portrait. However, Nabokov's literary criticism often seems thinner than his best allusions. Hence, in the Zhernosekov scenes, filial piety for his father's politics can balance his impatience with the limitations of nineteenth-century fiction. But the latter view does surface when Nabokov adds that "the tail of the mouse on a certain page in *Alice in Wonderland*" (*SM* 154) used the same typographical device as the Tolstoy portrait. This cross-cultural glide, from the pre-revolutionary past to an outlook more typical of the mature author, questions Zhernosekov's

didactic view of literature. For if the "realism" of "Master and Man" can melt into the fantasy of Lewis Carroll, then the term richly deserves to appear in quotation marks. Still, the complex then-and-now temporal perspective of *Speak, Memory* means that this text, unlike Nabokov's criticism, has also made allowances for the best aspirations of that realism.

Beyond this ambivalence about politics and realism, Zhernosekov's role as a stepping stone to memory evokes several continuities between Nabokov and Tolstoy. It is already significant that a Tolstoy-figure should usher in two major evocations of the past in *Speak, Memory*. For as a heavily autobiographical narrative of Russian family life, Tolstoy's *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth* has close affinities with the twelve Russian chapters of Nabokov's autobiography, and Nabokov's confidence that he had an exceptionally happy childhood chimes with the Tolstoyan ideal of family happiness. Above all, Tolstoy's passionate urge for contact with a missing parent, ranging from the mother in *Childhood* to the boy Nicholas Bolkonsky crying "Father, father" to the dead Prince Andrew (*War and Peace* 1309) and on to Levin's cult of his mother (*Anna Karenina* 87), adumbrates Nabokov's overwhelming need to commemorate his own father. In fact, when *Speak, Memory* addresses the schoolmaster as the one to whom "in a way, I owe the ability to continue" (29),[14] Nabokov directly invokes this Tolstoyan alter ego in pursuing his quest to recall his father. Similarly though less explicitly, *The Gift* can show the hero Fyodor thinking of a village schoolmaster (353) before he goes on to imagine an unexpected reunion with his father (354–55), who has vanished on an expedition in Central Asia. In this novel the actual "resurrection of the father" is preceded by the sound of a familiar footstep which may echo the scene of Nicholas Bolkonsky's birth, when Princess Mary hears her brother Andrew's footsteps on the stairs and realizes that he has not perished at Austerlitz.[15]

Speak, Memory's startling juxtaposition of Lewis Carroll with Tolstoy also captures the historical fluidity of Nabokovian modernism. For despite great differences, both authors wrote books in the 1860s and 1870s which Nabokov felt were unacknowledged forerunners of modern fiction. If he associated *Alice in Wonderland* with Joyce's *Ulysses*,[16] *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenin* were key precursors in more specific ways. According to Nabokov, the splendid moonlit night when Andrew falls in love with Natasha (*War and Peace* 460–61) offers "foreglimpses" of Proust's complex manipulations of imagery (*LL* 220–21), while Anna's random thoughts before her suicide presage stream of consciousness writing (*LRL* 183). And, going beyond Pnin's ideas at Cook's Castle, Nabokov carefully stresses the variable speeds of *Anna*'s two main plots (*LRL* 194–98). In an intuitive subversion of objective chronology, Tolstoy establishes a contrast between Levin's slower spiritual time and the rapidity of Anna's physical time. He thereby anticipates Joyce's and Proust's more self-conscious temporal initiatives (*LRL* 142), not to mention Nabokov's own experiments with rapid shifts among levels of time.

In the immediate context of *Speak, Memory*, however, the typographical portrait points up Nabokov's interest in the modernity of Tolstoy's descriptions. By turning writing into a visual artifact, the portrait emblematizes a peculiarly literal, even pictorial kind of imagery that self-reflexively correlates with one of Nabokov's main goals as an autobiographer, to create mnemonic pictures in words. Indeed, both the father's homecoming and the family gathering can seem so vivid because they were designed as verbal pictures, as scenes the narrator can "see with the utmost clarity" (*SM* 30) or even depict as a metaphorical movie in which "some knob is touched and a torrent of sounds comes to life" (171). In this connection Nabokov tellingly avoids an older, conventionally realistic vocabulary when he tries to account for *Anna*'s vividness of descriptive detail. Thus he downplays "the 'realism,' as it is called, of Tolstoy's descriptions," which has in fact "been deepened by others" (*LRL* 141). Instead, choosing a privileged term in early twentieth-century modernism, he singles out Tolstoy's *images*. *Anna*'s "flow of extraordinary imagery" (*LRL* 147) helps explain why it is such a remarkable novel: the slippery mushroom on Kitty's fork during her reconciliation with Levin (*Anna Karenina* 350) reveals the "brilliant eye of the great writer" (*LRL* 162), and thus belongs with all the other "Word Pictures" that make up so many of the book's "delightful and unforgettable images" (200). Here language like "unforgettable" and "brilliant eye" shows the close link between Nabokov's response to Tolstoy's descriptions and his own mnemonic pictures. And this linkage becomes explicit when Nabokov defines the image more generally as "a picture of fictitious life that becomes . . . as living as any personal recollection" (*LRL* 199), a formula which applies equally well to his updated view of Tolstoyan realism and to *Speak, Memory*.

Happy families and the commemoration of a beloved parent, a foretaste of modernism and its more deliberate manipulation of time, and finally the close relation between memorable descriptions and mnemonic images—these facets of Tolstoy lead on to Nabokov's autobiographical writing. They form the deeper literary rationale for the likeness he sees between his first Russian teacher and Tolstoy. Elsewhere, however, Nabokov broadens his praise for Tolstoy's descriptive powers by moving from the autobiographical detail to more reflective or "philosophical" aspects of the image. *Anna* is again the case in point. Near the end, as Levin ponders the meaning of existence, he notices "a small green bug creeping up a blade of witch grass" and helps it on its way (721). For Nabokov this seeming break in Levin's thoughts far outweighs his actual ideas. For it opens up a moment of concrete perception and participation that, by conveying "the turn, the switch, the gesture of thought" (*LRL* 166), dramatizes Levin's dawning awareness of important basic attitudes beneath his ideas. Along with the sudden wind, the falling oak, and the baby's wet diapers during the storm just before Levin's final profession of faith (*LRL* 168–69), the passage leads Nabokov to the ambitious contention that "literature is not a pattern of *ideas* but a pattern of *images*" (166).

An even stronger claim for the intellectual power of Tolstoyan imagery emerges in *Bend Sinister*, when the hero Adam Krug is shown writing. Krug, who is not a novelist but a philosopher, regains his inspiration when he compares life to a stocking being turned inside out (*BS* 193). This image reworks a famous Tolstoyan simile in the work Nabokov called the "greatest of great short stories" (*LRL* 140), the fearsome black sack of death in "The Death of Ivan Ilyich."[17] For *Bend Sinister*'s invented thinker, clearly, the idea is the image.

Moreover, because Krug's stocking and the Tolstoyan sack are not just graphic pictures but similes, imagery now means figurative language as well as vivid description. In effect Nabokov has assimilated Tolstoy to the more elaborate, multi-layered kind of imagery he identified with Proust (see "Nabokov and Proust" in this volume). Within *Bend Sinister*, in fact, the first example of Krug's image-making abilities is a "simile of the snowball and the snowman's broom" (*BS* 46). This image comes from the French philosopher Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, where it is used to define the key concept of duration.[18] Since in Nabokov's view Bergson was Proust's counterpart as an image-maker,[19] Krug's gift for philosophical tropes derives from a broadly Proustian French tradition as well as from Tolstoy.

Thus if Tolstoy excels at vivid records of immediate sensation, he can also succeed at other, more philosophical or figurative uses of the image. In his lecture on *Anna* Nabokov would coin the term "functional ethical comparison" to cover this side of Tolstoy (*LRL* 202). His tone may seem dismissive: rather than giving "a new slant to our artistic perceptions," Tolstoy's similes and metaphors focus on "ethical ideas." But when Nabokov notes that such images are often "rather stark," his epithet is telling; for as it wavers between "too simple" and "truly powerful," it allows for the explosive force of Ivan Ilyich's black sack. Tolstoy's readers will recall other such moments, like the sky above Prince Andrew at Austerlitz (*War and Peace* 301–302) or Anna's nightmares of a bearded Russian peasant mumbling in French, where vivid descriptions take on ethical meaning in less explicit, more metaphorical ways. It is not surprising that Nabokov responds to these images in his fiction.

The Tolstoyan sky in fact appears in one of Nabokov's best short stories, "Spring in Fialta." In the elaborate, extraordinary final sentence, the hero Victor recalls his last private moment with the heroine Nina, a fellow Russian exile whom he has met at intervals, once for a brief love affair. Today, during a chance encounter in the Adriatic resort town of Fialta, he has been oppressed by a sense of having squandered something generous and tender in their scattered meetings. But now, standing beside Nina on a terrace, he suddenly feels the warmth of the parapet; looking up at the sky, he realizes that the sun has come out. Alongside his previous melancholy, "this brimming white radiance" that "grew broader and broader"[20] seems an emblem of hope. As the sentence continues, however, the sky's brilliance becomes more enigmatic—"all dissolved in it, all vanished, all passed"—and Victor's memory jumps to a

newspaper account of Nina's death in a car crash just minutes after they parted. The "whiteness" of the sky, which has promoted and then dissolved the hero's clarity of vision, has become utterly ambiguous.

This Tolstoy echo depends not on "cut or intonation," to repeat Nabokov's terms cited above, but on situation and structure. Unlike Nabokov's sky, Tolstoy's is lofty and peaceful, and seems more explicitly religious in meaning; in addition, his sentences are far less elaborate. But both at Austerlitz and in Fialta the day begins with mist or haze, so that the heroes only really see the sky at the climactic, revelatory moment. And this moment soon dissolves back into contingency. Andrew must already struggle to maintain his vision when he is taken from the battlefield (315), and only renews it much later while talking with Pierre on the ferry (422). Nabokov vigorously compresses a similar psychological process. In a single turn of phrase he moves the reader from the warming sun to the bad news about Nina, and at the same time he embeds the chance of renewal within Victor's retrospective stance as narrator: Nina's elusive tenderness and generosity come back to him as he writes. On balance, therefore, the passage shows sympathy for the complex spiritual odyssey of Tolstoy's characters, even as it suggests Nabokov's greater metaphysical uncertainty.[21] By the same token it acknowledges a powerful image in *War and Peace*, but "modernizes" its presentation by sharpening the expressive role of technique.

This revision of Tolstoy also chimes with Nabokov's own dilemma as a Russian émigré who at the time had to contemplate writing in a new language.[22] The town of Fialta exists in a cultural limbo, with a Slavic past persisting (like the muffled echo of Prince Andrew's sky) alongside its new role as a modern European resort. In literary terms this European trend is broadly French, since Nina's husband is a Franco-Hungarian author and the story closes with a Paris date-line. But to pursue the implications of this cultural transition, it will be necessary to step back to Nabokov's first major novel *The Defense*, where the treatment of Tolstoy's potential European setting is at once more detailed and more evocative of later developments.

This novel opens by portraying the hero Luzhin as a moody, difficult boy. It is time to leave his family's country home for Petersburg, but just before the train arrives he runs away. His parents bring him back to the station with the help of "a black-bearded peasant . . . , future inhabitant of future nightmares" (24). This bearded peasant, who appears with maximum effect as the chapter ends, clearly recalls the central figure in Anna's terrifying dream, who was also linked with train travel. Nabokov would later analyze Anna's fateful nightmare in detail (*LRL* 175–88); and though Luzhin will not die beneath a train like Anna, he does eventually kill himself. For readers who sense the echo, the black-bearded peasant gives the story a general and lightly parodic sense of doom, somewhat in the spirit of Humbert Humbert's McFate. But elsewhere Nabokov can respond to a happier version of Tolstoyan fatalism. In *The Gift* Fyodor's delighted discovery of the pattern that brought him and Zina

together (363–64) may echo similar retrospective discoveries in *War and Peace*, first when Natasha is betrothed to Prince Andrew (527), then when Pierre is attracted to her (652).

Later, when Luzhin has become a chess master in Europe, the black-bearded peasant enters a more complex cross-cultural matrix of allusions. After Luzhin's breakdown during the Turati match, he enters a sanatorium, where he reads *Anna Karenin* for the first time but without much effect (167). During the same scene, however, he is examined by a psychoanalyst whose "black, curly beard" dimly recalls the peasant (159); the doctor's very appearance thereby helps fuel the paranoid sense of repetition that leads to Luzhin's suicide. Then, when the doctor asks about his childhood, Luzhin remembers with joy "the image of the fat French governess" who used to read him *The Count of Monte Cristo* (164; cf. 16).

These passages place Tolstoy at a major cross-roads in Nabokov's career. On the one hand, *Anna*'s bearded peasant gains a new European currency by being linked with the psychoanalyst. But the linkage is negative and funnels into Nabokov's life-long polemic against Freud. Later, in *Speak, Memory*, Zhernosekov can only appear after an introductory diatribe against Freud (20); and in his classes Nabokov would ask students to read Anna's nightmare "in terms of Tolstoy's literary art," not in terms of Freud (*LRL* 175). On the other hand, the scene has also overturned the peasant's menacing French. Luzhin feels joyous surprise at recovering a vivid, pictorial memory of his French teacher, who is associated as well with the pleasure of fiction. Several years later, when Nabokov comes back to the governess in "Mademoiselle O," he will link her with several explicit tributes to Proust's modern art of memory (see "Nabokov and Proust" in this volume).

Through this network of allusions Nabokov pivots from Tolstoy and the Russian past to a more active participation in modern European culture. Within this Europe, France dominates even though Nabokov was living in Germany at the time, and the governess's image lights up Luzhin's boyhood far more revealingly than the psychoanalyst's questions. Nabokov thus lays the groundwork for that side of his career which values Proust and a personal art of memory while recoiling from Freudian psychological theory. Yet unlike the hapless Luzhin, Nabokov will maintain contact with the author of *Anna Karenin*. Even as he contends that Tolstoy's vivid, mind-provoking images are proto-Proustian, that his memories of family life offer a meaningful alternative to Freud, and that his manipulation of time has an affinity with modernism, Nabokov also accepts Tolstoy as a personal literary landmark during the far-reaching cultural metamorphosis that led him through Europe to America, and beyond the literary canon into middlebrow and mass culture. As the "adventurous" allusions covered here suggest, these attitudes and developments stand at the heart of Nabokov's response to Tolstoy. But given the number and subtlety of his intertextual references during sixty years as an

active writer, full knowledge of Nabokov's Tolstoy connection must of course await further research.

John Burt Foster, Jr.

NOTES

1. Barthelme, pp. 35, 33.
2. English translations of Tolstoy's novel, including George Gibian's authoritative Norton Critical Edition, often call it *Anna Karenina*. But because Nabokov clearly preferred *Anna Karenin*, that will be the title used here, except in references to Gibian. Citations from *Anna* as well as from *War and Peace* will follow the Norton Critical Editions of these novels and will be given in the text.
3. M. Green, pp. 15–17, 23–24. Green does not address the key continuities between Nabokov and Tolstoy to be discussed in this article.
4. Traces of this project survive as the "Commentary Notes," largely devoted to Part I of *Anna Karenin*, in *Lectures on Russian Literature*, pp. 210–36.
5. Beaujour, p. 85.
6. Boyd, 1991, p. 171.
7. McLean, pp. 6, 7.
8. John Foster, 1993, *passim*.
9. Hyde, p. 58.
10. Ibid., pp. 59–63.
11. Barabtarlo, 1989, pp. 119–20.
12. Ibid., pp. 183, 202–203, 210, 217.
13. Nabokov does not reference this scene under "Tolstoy" in his otherwise very complete index to *Speak, Memory*. The Russian version of the autobiography is even more emphatic about the linkage, for it also mentions the schoolmaster's "broadnosed face of the Tolstoyan type" (*Drugie berega*, p. 20) on his very first appearance.
14. The Russian version is even more explicit, for it connects Zhernosekov with the goddess of memory: "With the aid of Vasily Martynovich, Mnemosyne can move even further along my personal wayside of general history" (*Drugie berega*, p. 21).
15. *War and Peace*, pp. 351–52. For more on the footstep motif in *The Gift*, see Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 110–12. I am indebted to Professor Alexandrov for pointing out this parallel with *War and Peace*, as well as for several others discussed below.
16. John Foster, 1993, pp. 166–67.
17. For more details on this passage and how it reworks Tolstoy, see the essay on *Bend Sinister* in this volume.
18. John Foster, 1993, p. 84.
19. Ibid., p. 87.
20. Nabokov, *Nabokov's Dozen*, p. 38.
21. Thus, in another parallel between Tolstoy and Nabokov, it is significant that when Pierre is wakened from his dream after the battle of Borodino, and thinks "One second more and I should have understood it all" (942), he should resemble certain Nabokovian characters on the verge of revelation, like V. struggling to join his dying brother in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* or the narrator in "Ultima Thule" trying to learn Adam

Falter's vision. But whereas Nabokov's narratives end at this point of bafflement, Pierre goes on to have another, less enigmatic dream (1181–82); later he can even make an explicit statement of faith (1226).

22. "Spring in Fialta" was published in 1936, in the same year that Nabokov published his French sketch "Mademoiselle O" and shortly before he began taking a more active role in the English translations of his novels. By 1938 he had started writing *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, his first novel in English.

NABOKOV AND SOME TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY ENGLISH WRITERS

Although Vladimir Nabokov praised such major writers as Pushkin, Gogol, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Flaubert, and Joyce, he often ridiculed such influential writers as Dostoevsky, Thomas Mann, T.S. Eliot, and Faulkner. In interviews he dismissed Galsworthy and Dreiser as mediocrities (*SO* 57) and remarked, "I cannot abide Conrad's souvenir-shop style, bottled ships and shell necklaces of romanticist clichés" (*SO* 42). Despite Edmund Wilson's repeated efforts to interest him in Henry James, he urged Wilson "to debunk that pale porpoise and his plush vulgarities" (*NWL* 278), although Nabokov later explained to an interviewer, "My feelings towards James are rather complicated. I really dislike him intensely but now and then the figure in the phrase, the turn of the epithet, the screw of an absurd adverb, cause me a kind of electric tingle, as if some current of his was also passing through my own blood" (*SO* 64). In contrast to his animadversions on such literary lions, Nabokov occasionally expressed admiration for certain writers whose reputations have declined since he read them in his youth. As a boy, Nabokov shared his father's enthusiasm for English literature, and although he eventually outgrew many of his youthful tastes, his work is sometimes energized by the electric currents of various turn-of-the-century English writers, particularly Arthur Conan Doyle, Rupert Brooke, and H.G. Wells.

The Hungarian-born English novelist Emmuska Orczy (1865–1947), the author of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1905), is among the writers who "lost the glamour and thrill" that they had held for Nabokov in his youth (*SO* 43). The Scarlet Pimpernel, Sir Percy Blakeney, who helps aristocrats escape during the French Revolution, resurfaces transformed in *Pnin* in Victor Wind's bedtime fantasy. Victor has seen a school production of a dramatic version of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, and at night to induce sleep he imagines his own story of a revolution from which a king escapes with the aid of one Percival Blake (*Pnin* 85–7). This fantasy is further elaborated in *Pale Fire* with the similar escape of King Charles from Zembla. Nabokov invigorates both *Pnin* and *Pale Fire* by

incorporating the melodramatic derring-do and ardor of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and other adventure tales.

Another model for the story of King Charles of Zembla is Rudolph Rassendyll's adventure in Ruritania in *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894), by Anthony Hope Hawkins (1863–1933). Nabokov does not include Hope in his list of boyhood favorites, and indeed in 1940 in *The New Republic* he refers slightingly to Ruritania in his unfavorable review of John Masefield's novel *Basilissa*.[1] Nevertheless, as a boy and avid Anglophile reader of high adventure, Nabokov most probably read the enormously popular *Prisoner of Zenda* and its sequel, *Rupert of Hentzau* (1898). *Pale Fire* parodies and subverts the genre epitomized by Hope. Some of the parallels between Zenda and Zembla are the above-average heights of Rassendyll and King Charles, the secret passages, the escapes, the disguises, and the concluding assassinations in gardens. Hope's innkeeper's buxom daughter prefigures a Zemblan farmer's daughter, fastidiously rejected by King Charles. In the Ruritanian novels and in *Pale Fire*, the vivid descriptions are saturated with bright and contrasting colors. Nabokov's major contravention of the formula for fictitious political revolutions is his granting success to the unpromising revolutionary party, with the subsequent bathetic decline of the royal hero's fortunes.

More pervasively than the adventure tale, detective fiction haunts and informs many of Nabokov's plots and characters. The Sherlock Holmes stories by Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930) were a great boyhood enthusiasm of Nabokov's (*SO* 43, 129, 174).[2] He read them again when he was ill in February 1946, presumably in the "omnibus edition of Sherlock Holmes" that for years has pursued the narrator of *Pnin* (190). A month later, in response to some sketches of butterflies sent by Edmund Wilson, Nabokov replied with a whimsical letter in the ratiocinative style of Sherlock Holmes, deducing thirteen attributes of the person who drew the butterflies, for example, that he was not an entomologist, that at some time in June he had been in a country house in New York state, that a lady had lent him a pair of small pointed scissors to cut out one of the butterflies, and that "the lady was doing the talking." At one point Nabokov admits in the letter's margin, "The reasoning here is uh-uh," thus reflecting the implausible and unconvincing nature of many of Sherlock Holmes's deductions (*NWL* 162–63, 166–67).

Although well aware of the limitations of detective stories, throughout his work Nabokov draws on elements of the Holmes persona: the superior man, independent, aloof, intense, precise, highly intelligent and imaginative, and physically proficient. Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev in *The Gift* is a benign exemplar; Van Veen in *Ada* is a grotesque variant. Nabokov himself manifested these traits not only in his writing but in his lepidopterological research, athletic activities, and personal relationships. Above all, Nabokov's writing emphasizes the close observation of phenomena and the discovery of hidden patterns, a patient accumulation of clues yielding a sudden insight. In *The Defense* the young Aleksandr Ivanovich Luzhin is entranced by Doyle's

detective: "Sherlock endowing logic with the glamour of a daydream, Sherlock composing a monograph on the ash of all known sorts of cigars and with this ash as with a talisman progressing through a crystal labyrinth of possible deductions to the one radiant conclusion" (34). This evocation of the Holmes mystique indicates the primary limitation of detective fiction: the single solution, as in a chess problem, is essential to the puzzle formula of detective fiction, whereas great art invites a multiplicity of unresolved interpretations.

As with the adventure tale, Nabokov incorporates elements of the detective-story genre into a larger design. In his foreword to *The Eye* Nabokov writes, "The texture of the tale mimics that of detective fiction," yet "the stress is not on the mystery but on the pattern," to the glorification of imagination, even though thwarted ([iv]). In *Despair* not only does the narrator, Hermann Karlovich, propose a plot for an ultimate Sherlock Holmes story (121) but his comments on murder remind his wife, Lydia, of "some Sherlock Holmes adventure" (144). By the details Lydia provides, the reader may recognize a specific story, "The Problem of Thor Bridge," included in *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* (1927). The allusion to this late story, first published in the *Strand Magazine* in 1922, indicates that Nabokov's interest in Sherlock Holmes continued beyond childhood. The particularity of this allusion emphasizes the absurdity of Hermann's unrealistic scheme and intensifies Nabokov's parody and transmutation of the detective-story genre.

Just as in *Lolita* Nabokov names the director of the girls' camp Shirley Holmes (64), hinting that the texture of the tale mimics detective fiction, so V., the narrator of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, uses "an old Sherlock Holmes stratagem" (151). Sebastian Knight's first novel, *The Prismatic Bezel*, is said to be "not a parody of the Sherlock Holmes vogue but a parody of the modern reaction from it" (92). In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, as in *The Eye*, although V. is frequently thwarted, the imagination's potential for enlightenment is triumphantly exalted.

Similarly, in *Pale Fire*, to suggest the possibility of profound discovery by an imaginative shift in perspective, John Shade writes in his first canto, "Was he in *Sherlock Holmes*, the fellow whose / Tracks pointed back when he reversed his shoes?" (34). Charles Kinbote suspects "that our poet simply made up this Case of the Reversed Footprints" (78). In fact, Holmes did employ this dubious technique, or so he claims in "The Adventure of the Empty House," included in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905). Shade makes a distant Holmesian allusion in his second canto when his daughter, Hazel, asks her mother for the meaning of the word "grimpen" (p. 46). She is evidently reading T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1943), wherein the second section, "East Coker," refers to the dangers found "in a dark wood, in a bramble, / On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold."[3] Eliot generalizes the term "grimpen" from the fictitious place-name the Grimpen Mire, created by Doyle in his Sherlock Holmes novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902). Since Hazel

soon drowns in a swamp, a ghost of Sherlock Holmes is present at this most pathetic of all Nabokov's deaths.

Another writer whom Nabokov professed to have outgrown was Rupert Brooke (1887–1915): poet, world traveler, and soldier who died of blood poisoning in the Aegean Sea. In 1942 Nabokov explained to Edmund Wilson that the Russian poems in his 1923 collection *The Empyrean Path* "were written when I was still in my teens and are strongly influenced by the Georgian poets, Rupert Brooke, De la Mare, etc., by whom I was much fascinated at the time" (*NWL* 79). From this book Nabokov translated only "I Still Keep Mute" for inclusion in *Poems and Problems*. He did not reprint or translate his nineteen-page essay "Rupert Brooke," published in 1922, the year before publication of *The Empyrean Path*. Field translates an enthusiastic passage from Nabokov's essay on Brooke: "There is one uncommon and attractive feature in his art: an, as it were, radiant moisture—not for nothing was he in the Navy, and even his very name means 'stream' in English. This Tiutchev-like love towards all that streams, murmurs, and is clear and cold is expressed so vividly, so convincingly in the majority of his poems that one wants not to read them, but to suck them through a straw, hold them close to one's face like damp flowers, to immerse oneself in them as in the freshness of a sky-blue lake."[4]

A more revealing sentence in Nabokov's essay on Brooke is cited and translated by Tammi: "No poet has so frequently and with such a painful and creative astuteness looked into the dimness of the beyond / the hereafter / another world [potustoronnost']."[5] Transcendence into another world is a vital theme throughout Nabokov's work, and a comparative study of Brooke's and Walter de la Mare's poems and Nabokov's essay and early poems could illuminate its first manifestations. Nabokov clearly reflects a general affinity with de la Mare (1873–1956). He shares de la Mare's fondness for alliteration and enchantment and his implicit "conviction," as W.H. Auden writes in an essay on de la Mare, "that what our senses perceive of the world about us is not all there is to know."[6]

Brooke, on the other hand, is often explicit about transcendent mysteries of consciousness after the body's dissolution. In his poem "Second Best" he foresees after death "some white tremendous daybreak" in "the great dawn." In the sonnet "Oh! Death will find me, long before I tire," the speaker welcomes a newly dead friend to Hades, and in "Dust" dead lovers will be reunited when "One mote of all the dust that's I / Shall meet one atom that was you." In Brooke's poem "Mummia," as in Nabokov's novel *Transparent Things*, the dead attend the living: "The unheard invisible lovely dead / Lie with us in this place, / And ghostly hands above my head / Close face to straining face." In Brooke's poem "Thoughts on the Shape of the Human Body," a lover hopes that one may "Rise disentangled from humanity" into "some perfect sphere, / . . . through the eternal night," whereas in his poem "Heaven" the less idealistic fish wonder, "But is there anything Beyond?" and they hope that

"somewhere, beyond Space and Time, / Is wetter water, slimier slime!" In Brooke's "Hauntings" a ghost "Is haunted by strange doubts, evasive dreams, / Hints of a pre-Lethean life." And John Shade might well have written Brooke's "Sonnet (Suggested by Some of the Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research)," which conjectures that after death we will "Learn all we lacked before; hear, know, and say / What this tumultuous body now denies; / And feel, who have laid our groping hands away; / And see, no longer blinded by our eyes."[7]

In a 1964 interview Nabokov commented that Brooke was one of his "favorites" during his twenties and thirties (*SO* 43), and echoes of Brooke's poetry did not end with *The Empyrean Path*. In Nabokov's subsequent Russian poems translated in his *Poems and Problems*, the influence of Brooke seems to shape the theme of entering paradise in "I Like That Mountain," "In Paradise," "Lilith," "How I Love You," and "The Paris Poem"; the theme of the transfiguration of the soul in "The Formula" and "Fame"; and the theme of visits from the dead in "The Dream," "Evening on a Vacant Lot," and "At Sunset." Nabokov's English poem "The Poplar," in *Poems and Problems*, seems derived from Brooke's "Home," which describes the phantom image of a strange woman, "The form of one I did not know / Sitting in my chair."[8] Nabokov's "An Evening of Russian Poetry," in his *Poems and Problems*, echoes the personified prosody of Brooke's "A Letter to a Live Poet." Nabokov's characteristic precision with significant detail is reminiscent of the vivid imagery in Brooke's poems "Blue Evening," "The Great Lover," and "The Old Vicarage, Grantchester." And as Field observes, Brooke's title "The Night Journey" is appropriated for Nabokov's fictitious English poet Vivian Calmbrood.[9]

In Nabokov's fiction Brooke's spirit seems to emanate from the hero of *Glory*, Martin Edelweiss, whom Nabokov calls "the kindest, uprightest, and most touching of all my young men" (*Glory* xi). Nabokov denies literary talent to Martin but endows him with the imagination to create the fantasy realm of Zoorland and the courage to pursue his image of glory. When he is a boy, his mother is guided by "her late governess, old, wise Mrs. Brook, whose son had collected orchids in Borneo, had flown over the Sahara in a balloon, and had died in a Turkish bath when the boiler burst" (5–6). After attending Brooke's and Nabokov's Cambridge University, Martin disappears into his high adventure, and finally in a winter thaw "all one could hear was a faint gurgle: water was running somewhere under the wet gray snow" (205) in one of Nabokov's eloquent brooks.

Throughout his life Nabokov consistently praised H.G. Wells (1866–1946) above all other turn-of-the-century English writers. Wells was an acquaintance of Nabokov's father and a guest of the Nabokov family in St. Petersburg (*SO* 104; *SM* 255). Later, after attending Cambridge with one of Wells's sons, Nabokov developed a friendship with H.G. Wells himself.[10] In an interview Nabokov stated, "H.G. Wells, a great artist, was my favorite

writer when I was a boy. *The Passionate Friends*, *Ann Veronica*, *The Time Machine*, *The Country of the Blind*, all these stories are far better than anything Bennett, or Conrad, or, in fact, any of Wells' contemporaries would produce. His sociological cogitations can be safely ignored, of course, but his romances and fantasias are superb" (*SO* 103–104; see also 100, 127, 139, 175). Vadim, the mock-Nabokov narrator of *Look at the Harlequins!*, remarks of Wells, "I said that he was the greatest romancer and magician of our time, but that I could not stand his sociological stuff" (19). Vadim and his first wife remember details from *The Passionate Friends* (1913) and Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) (19, 73–74). Wells's *The Invisible Man* (1897) appears on Sebastian Knight's bookshelf (39). This book is a "delightful tale," and a book about an "Invisible Albino" is "one of the greatest novels of English literature," according to the narrator of *Ada*, Van Veen, who twice compares his own actions with those of characters in *The Invisible Man* and also alludes to Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898) (19, 133, 203).

Veen might well have compared his youthful affair with Ada at the estate of Ardis with the relationship of George Ponderevo and Beatrice Normandy at the estate of Bladesover in Wells's *Tono-Bungay* (1909). Veen might also have noticed that his long and stormy incestuous relationship with his sister Ada is a nightmarish form of the forbidden and furtive relationship that Wells portrays in *The Passionate Friends*, a novel that may serve as an anticipatory rough gloss of *Ada*'s themes of jealousy, sexual servitude, and aspirations of freedom.

Many of Wells's themes appear in Nabokov's work. For example, Nabokov's aesthetic search for a numinous pattern, revealed in mundane details, reflects the mystical sensibility of Wells's George Ponderevo, who says, "I know that over all these merry immediate things, there are other things that are great and serene, very high, beautiful things—the reality. . . . There is something links things for me, a sunset or so, a mood or so, the high air, something there was in Marion's form and colour, something I find and lose in Mantegna's pictures, something in the lines of these boats I make."[11] Nabokov's search for pattern also resembles Ann Veronica's study of biology in *Ann Veronica: A Modern Love Story* (1909): "The little streaks upon the germinating area of an egg, the nervous movements of an impatient horse, the trick of a calculating boy, the senses of a fish, the fungus at the root of a garden flower, and the slime upon a sea-wet rock—ten thousand such things bear their witness and are illuminated. And not only did these tentacular generalizations gather all the facts of natural history and comparative anatomy together, but they seemed always stretching out further and further into a world of interests that lay altogether outside their legitimate bounds."[12] She ponders the apparent conflict between Darwinian natural selection and the sense of beauty: "Was it that the struggle of things to survive produced as a sort of necessary by-product these intense preferences and appreciations, or was it that some mystical outer thing, some great force, drove life beautyward, even

in spite of expediency, regardless of survival value and all the manifest discretions of life?" When she raises these questions with her biology demonstrator, he refers her to "a various literature upon the markings of butterflies, the incomprehensible elaboration and splendor of birds of Paradise and humming-birds' plumes, the patterning of tigers, and a leopard's spots."[13]

Nabokov echoes this theme and even the phrasing. In "The Poem" he observes, "the leopards of words, / the leaflike insects, the eye-spotted birds / fuse and form a silent, intense, / mimetic pattern of perfect sense" (*PP* 157). In *Speak, Memory* Nabokov, for whom "coincidence of pattern is one of the wonders of nature" (157), offers several examples of elaborate natural mimicry and concludes, "When a butterfly has to look like a leaf, not only are all the details of a leaf beautifully rendered but markings mimicking grub-bored holes are generously thrown in. 'Natural selection,' in the Darwinian sense, could not explain the miraculous coincidence of imitative aspect and imitative behavior, nor could one appeal to the theory of 'the struggle for life' when a protective device was carried to a point of mimetic subtlety, exuberance, and luxury far in excess of a predator's power of appreciation. I discovered in nature the nonutilitarian delights that I sought in art. Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception" (125).

Another Nabokovian theme, the temporal speculation expressed in *Ada*, suggests slightly the implications of Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) with its two lingering strange white flowers. Although in his fantasies Wells writes in an appropriately choppy "scientific" style, with little of the flourish or flexibility of Nabokov's prose, occasionally Wells approaches Nabokov's sensuous evanescence, as in the description of the vanishing of a time-machine: "One of the candles on the mantel was blown out, and the little machine suddenly swung round, became indistinct, was seen as a ghost for a second perhaps, as an eddy of faintly glittering brass and ivory; and it was gone—vanished!"[14]

Invitation to a Beheading, which Nabokov called "on the whole a burst of spontaneous generation" (*SO* 74), is a book-length elaboration of the themes of Wells's short story "The Country of the Blind" (1907). Both protagonists, Wells's Nunez and Nabokov's Cincinnatus C., are subjected to intense pressures to conform to the condition and behavior of the average citizen. Each has a power unavailable to the other characters: Nunez is the only character with eyesight, and he is considered subnormal and intractable; Cincinnatus is convicted of the crime of "opacity" in "this world of souls transparent to one another" (21, 24), after having endured a nonconformist lifetime of scorn from others. Each protagonist attempts to accommodate himself to societal norms: Nunez recants his statements about his incomprehensible power of seeing and also recants his remarks about the unverifiable presence of the sky; Cincinnatus attempts to feign transparency, a condition that is innate in the others. Each protagonist is ultimately threatened with dire punishment for his unorthodoxy: the elders decide to blind Nunez in order to cure him of his heresy about the world he sees; the courts sentence Cincinnatus to death. Each protagonist

finally escapes: Nunez climbs out of the valley to return to the society of his birth; Cincinnatus demolishes the insubstantial world like a stage set and makes his way "in that direction where, to judge by the voices, stood beings akin to him" (223).

Wells wrote many stories involving hallucination or extraordinary perception, as some of their titles suggest: "The Beautiful Suit," "The Door in the Wall," "The Temptation of Harringay" (to which Nabokov refers, by the title *The Portrait*, in *Nikolai Gogol*, p. 82), "The Moth," "The Plattner Story," "The Late Mr. Elvesham," "Under the Knife," "Pollock and the Porroh Man," "The Crystal Egg," "The Man Who Could Work Miracles," "The Magic Shop," "Mr. Skelmersdale in Fairyland," "The Inexperienced Ghost," "The New Accelerator," and "The Stolen Body" (1895–1903). Variations on this theme of extraordinary perception, potential or realized, genuine or deluded, appear with a Wellsian twist throughout Nabokov's work, including his short stories, especially in "Ultima Thule" and "Signs and Symbols," and his poems, most explicitly in "Fame" and "Restoration."

Wells's hallucinatory "The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes," in *The Stolen Bacillus and Other Incidents* (1895), bears a strong resemblance to Nabokov's short story "Terra Incognita," about a delirious man whose hallucinations leave the reader uncertain whether the character is actually in a European city or a tropical jungle.[15] In Wells's unambiguous story, Davidson is affected by an electromagnet during a thunderstorm so that he sees not his surroundings but a locale eight thousand miles away on Antipodes Island in the South Seas. For three weeks he describes the island in detail, and then he begins to see parts of his actual English environment through "holes" in his field of vision. "At first it was very confusing to him to have these two pictures overlapping each other like the changing views of a lantern, but in a little while he began to distinguish the real from the illusory."[16] A friend of Davidson, returning from the South Seas, confirms the accuracy of Davidson's phantom perceptions, and a professor develops an untestable hypothesis involving "a kink in space," according to the analogy "that two points might be a yard away on a sheet of paper, and yet be brought together by bending the paper round."[17] This spatial trope corresponds with Nabokov's image in *Speak, Memory*: "I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another" (139). In contrast to Wells's story, Nabokov's ambiguous "Terra Incognita" and many of his other fictions offer alternative realities, mutually exclusive and yet somehow coexistent, overlapping in a suprarational transcendence of space and time.

Nabokov often allusively folds the pattern of his literary magic carpet to correspond with the images, characters, situations, themes, and styles of other writers, yet he insisted in an interview in 1964, "Today I can always tell when a sentence I compose happens to resemble in cut and intonation that of any of the writers I loved or detested half a century ago; but I do not believe that any

particular writer has had any definite influence upon me" (*SO* 46). Nevertheless, much about Nabokov's aesthetic might be discovered by intensive study of Doyle, Brooke, and Wells. Some other relevant turn-of-the-century English writers whom Nabokov admired, at least for a while, are Oscar Wilde, A.E. Housman, Rudyard Kipling, Norman Douglas, and G.K. Chesterton (*SO* 43, 56–57). One might also examine an American novel that Lolita considers too "highbrow" to read during vacation (*Lo* 173): Geneva Stratton Porter's *A Girl of the Limberlost* (1909), about a student who collects moths in the Limberlost Swamp of Indiana.

J.B. Sisson

NOTES

1. Nabokov, "Mr. Masefield and Clio," p. 809.
2. For a discussion of Nabokov's allusions to Sherlock Holmes, see *AnL* 365–66, n. 64/1.
3. Eliot, 1958, p. 125.
4. Field, 1967, p. 66.
5. Tammi, 1985, p. 25, n. 64.
6. Auden, p. 391.
7. Brooke, pp. 22, 53, 56, 62, 127, 135, 136.
8. Ibid., p. 146.
9. Field, 1967, p. 85.
10. Field, 1977, p. 94.
11. Wells, 1935, p. 203.
12. Wells, 1909, p. 173.
13. Ibid., p. 188.
14. Wells, 1952, p. 15.
15. For a discussion of "Terra Incognita" and an extended comparison with Wells's "The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes" and "The Late Mr. Elvesham," see Sisson, 1979, pp. 95–153.
16. Wells, 1952, p. 281.
17. Ibid., pp. 282, 283.

NABOKOV, UPDIKE, AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

John Updike wrote about Nabokov much more often than did any other American prose writer. Some ten of his published reviews of Nabokov's books—from *The Defense* to *Look at the Harlequins!*—are known. Together with Anthony Burgess, Herbert Gold, and John Barth, Updike took part in an

anniversary issue of *TriQuarterly* (Winter 1970) that was timed to coincide with Nabokov's seventieth birthday and that named him as the best living American writer. It is unlikely that this was simply a tribute to the anniversary genre, since Updike had appraised Nabokov in the same way even earlier. Seven years later, in a McGraw-Hill auditorium where an American memorial service was taking place, Updike repeated that for him Nabokov was one of the few who defended not with declarations but with deeds the merits of literature in our era of indifference to it.

When a writer such as Updike who enjoys a reputation as one of the most important novelists of today calls another writer a "grandmaster," while letting it be understood that he himself is still far from having achieved such heights, suppositions naturally arise about the fairly strong influence that the "grandmaster" has exerted on the one writing about him in so respectful a tone. The tendency to interpret Updike as Nabokov's literary pupil was obvious from the very first serious critical interpretations of his works. However, despite the seeming cogency of these attempts, to this day they do not look fully proven. To put it in Nabokov's terms, they lack "conclusive evidence." One should not be surprised by this, since Updike's attitude toward Nabokov was always extremely complicated, combining an acknowledgment of the "grandmaster's" achievements with a polemic that concerned not the details but the essence of Nabokov's conception of literature.

Updike called Nabokov a "grandmaster" in his review of the English translation of *The Defense*, which appeared in 1964. The persistent obviousness of the chess metaphor ought not to confuse us: Updike genuinely regards Nabokov as the highest literary authority. For him Nabokov is "the best writer of English prose at present holding American citizenship, the only writer, with the possible exception of the long-silent Thornton Wilder, whose books, considered as a whole, give the happy impression of an *oeuvre*."[1] Until Updike, no American had spoken of Nabokov with such reverence.

Several Russian reviews, especially Vladislav Khodasevich's from the 1930s, were no less complimentary. However, quite naturally, Nabokov was considered by these critics exclusively in the Russian context, and only Nina Berberova, who dedicated a chapter to Nabokov in her autobiography *Kursiv moi* (*The Italics Are Mine*), said that here was a writer who had surmounted the "two-dimensional [dvukhmernoe] past" that had ruled émigré literature, and who therefore belonged to "the whole Western world (or the world in general), not only to Russia."[2] Updike definitely links Nabokov to American culture. His only doubt is occasioned by the fact that this culture itself might prove unworthy of a "grandmaster": "One hesitates to call him an 'American' writer; the phrase fetches to mind Norman Mailer and James Jones and other homegrown cabbages loyally mistaken for roses."[3]

To read *The Defense* as an American novel is, of course, impossible. However, for Updike, Nabokov is all the more attractive precisely because he has no analogue either in the American literary tradition or among his

contemporaries. From this point of view, Nabokov appears to fill a certain lacuna which is quite perceptible even during a cursory glance at "our literature, that scraggly association of hermits, cranks, and exiles," which "is strange enough to include this arrogant immigrant; as an expatriate Nabokov is squarely in the native tradition," even if "his fiction is . . . scarcely precedented."[4] Even Melville and James will not serve for comparison, to say nothing of the writers of Updike's generation.

Within this rather muddled discussion, it is noteworthy that from the very start Updike attempts to state his own understanding of a problem that the majority of Nabokov scholars simply ignore: is he or is he not connected with the American native tradition, whatever the names by which that tradition might be designated? Is it possible for a writer who has lived in America for three decades, changed languages, and achieved worldwide fame through his books in English, nevertheless to remain entirely outside the values and aims that distinguish the culture of the second homeland that he found for himself late in life? Is it really possible to speak of Nabokov as an American writer if one has in mind not the fact of his citizenship but the peculiarities of his work? And if this is possible, is there any basis for maintaining that Nabokov's presence in American literature had any serious creative consequences for it, led to the appearance of pupils, created a certain school, influenced the character of the post-Nabokov novel, and so on?

It is impossible to answer all of these questions on the basis alone of Nabokov's remarks about American writers of the past and present. Nabokov is extremely biased on this point, as he always was in judging literature: there is no objectivity, and only either contemptuous silence, skepticism, or disparaging parody. With the exception of Poe and James, almost all the American classics were for Nabokov a world of illusory values, a kingdom of banality, sad evidence of the triumph of vulgar tastes, an illustration of mass delusions that had created for literary nonentities an unfounded reputation of being significant artists. As the years passed, Nabokov's snobbery regarding American literature only grew stronger. The references to Faulkner in *Ada*, each instance accompanied by sarcastic travestying, would in themselves be enough to give one a sense of how foreign to Nabokov was everything that signified the highest or, in any event, the generally accepted American achievements in literature.

It is true that on rare occasions he praised specific American contemporaries, including Updike, whom he singled out in the 1975 interview, and Edmund White (who had just published his first novel *Forgetting Elena*) and Salinger.[5] In *Strong Opinions* he said that America had provided him an intellectually kindred milieu, splendid readers, and the sensation that here he was at home both spiritually and emotionally (*SO* 10). However, in answer to a direct question as to whether he considered himself an American writer, Nabokov limited himself to the reflection that he had an American passport and American publishers (*SO* 26–27). In other words, he silently tried to

dissociate himself from the same "native tradition" that Updike attempts to find in his books.

Nabokov did this more insistently the more confidently he was called "the greatest living American novelist" (a quote from a review in *Time* that was printed on the dustcover of *Ada*), and was acknowledged, following the English critic Walter Allen, as the greatest figure in American prose after Faulkner and Hemingway.[6] From all appearances, Nabokov did not need such laurels. He preferred to think of himself only as an American citizen, but he did not associate his art with the circumstances that forced him to cross the Atlantic in 1940. Even his change of languages did not become for him a decisive argument for considering himself henceforth an American writer; moreover the predominance of American material in *Ada* and *Lolita* could not serve such an argument. It is obviously senseless to read these books as social novels in which the author's efforts are focused on creating a faithful portrait of a specific environment. For Nabokov such a task was never important, and the writings of his American years are distinguished from those of his Russian period only by greater esotericism. Nabokov's often repeated idea, that a writer's national identity should not be anyone's business because a writer's passport is his art, is thus substantially confirmed.

All the same, this notion is not as axiomatic as it might appear. Polemicizing with it, Updike discovers serious arguments. In his view, Nabokov's writings in America and in English are the best the "grandmaster" created. Such claims are unprovable, of course, since, were we to compare, for example, *Pale Fire* with *The Gift*, there are no criteria that would allow us to declare with assurance the superiority of the first book to the second. It would be fairer to say that these works are of entirely different artistic natures. However, it is just this difference, obvious to anyone, that is important here. What was published under the name of V. Sirin and what was published by Nabokov in his American years is genuinely too dissimilar for this dissimilarity to be explained only by the fact that the artist's creative interests changed with time. The new reality in which Nabokov found himself after his flight from Europe could not but influence his works, and not only in the sense that there appeared new themes and a social landscape that were unfamiliar to Nabokov's readers. It is much more crucial that to a certain extent his vision itself changed.

It is precisely this shift that Updike strives to understand. He finds this fairly difficult to do, since he reads through Nabokov's Russian books without noticing a great deal in them, especially the echoes of the frame of mind that distinguished the first wave of Russian émigrés. In his review of *The Defense* he is primarily interested in the device by means of which "autobiographical elements are so cunningly rearranged and transmuted by a fictional design"; but as a result the novel turns out to be only a kind of "chess puzzle pieced out with human characters"—an evaluation with which probably not one of Nabokov's Russian readers would agree.[7] To perceive *Glory* as Nabokov's "sunniest book" and its central character as his "healthiest hero"[8] can be done

only under the condition that the existential choice Martin makes is recognized as a literary game and no more, although what is important for Nabokov here is a certain behavioral logic that betrays unhealthy aspects of émigré self-consciousness.

To say that Updike simply undervalues Sirin would be false; even in *Mary*, which Nabokov himself later found to be almost a juvenile effort, Updike discovers aspects of a work that "not only adumbrates the future of a master, it shines by its own light. From the start Nabokov had his sharp peripheral vision, an intent deftness at netting the gaudy phrase, and the knack . . . of setting up combinations."[9]

However, Nabokov's Russian novels are interpreted by Updike as if they were created exclusively as stylistic experiments, and as if the search for an artistic language was for Sirin a self-sufficient task. Updike does not share the accepted view of Nabokov as a "verbal magician working with stuffed rabbits and hats nobody could wear." Even in *The Defense* "Nabokov's characters live . . . their frames are loaded with bright color and twisted to fit abstract schemes but remain anatomically credible." But for Updike they have a kind of doll-like identity, and it is hardly possible to expect otherwise "within Nabokov's rather narrow field of vision."[10] For that reason, Luzhin's final disappearance does not convince Updike; it is all only "the foreordained outcome of an abstract scheme," the result "of rather aimless intricacies."[11] If one examines Sirin's books while ignoring the reality that is expressed in them, as if they all really were only elegantly constructed chess problems, such a conclusion becomes inevitable. However, this does not make the approach itself more convincing.

When Updike evaluates Nabokov's writings in English, the image of America interests him most of all. In Updike's view, the superiority of the American novels over Nabokov's Russian books is based on the fact that only after crossing the ocean does Nabokov's field of vision in prose become expansive enough to incorporate the life around him. Updike expressed this extremely subjective notion, which was important for him, as early as 1966, when he reviewed *Speak, Memory*; he was also to return to it many times: "In America his almost impossible style encountered, after twenty years of hermetic exile, a subject as impossible as itself, ungainly with the same affluence. He rediscovered our monstrosity. His fascinatingly astigmatic stereopticon projected not only the landscape—the eerie arboreal suburbs, the grand emptinesses, the exotic and touchingly temporary junk of roadside America—but the wistful citizens of a violent society desperately oversold, in the absence of other connectives, on love."[12]

From the quoted judgment it is clear that for Updike Nabokov is first and foremost the author of *Lolita*, which is acknowledged not only as his main work, but as a meta-text toward which all the most important lines forming his artistic universe converge and from which they radiate. In this respect Updike is not alone. A similar perception of *Lolita* is also typical for other American writers who were to a greater or lesser degree influenced by

Nabokov, above all John Hawkes, John Barth, and Edward Albee. As for Updike himself, echoes of *Lolita*—meaning above all that panorama of America that is recreated by means of Nabokov's "stereopticon"—are visible in his own books belonging approximately to the same period: in the collections of stories *The Same Door* and *Pigeon Feathers*, and in the novel *Rabbit, Run*. With the distance of time it becomes increasingly clear that for American literature *Lolita* turned out to be the book containing a genuinely new discovery of that "grand emptiness" that becomes a stubborn theme after Nabokov's novel, and not only for Updike. In essence, this is the leitmotif of the prose of the 1960s, when Nabokov's presence was felt in American culture with particular immediacy.

In some sense it is unavoidable that *Lolita* seemingly pushed into the background all else that Nabokov wrote both before and after, prompting the perception of his other books either as steps preparatory to this main creative achievement, or as its continuations. Like any canonization, such an isolation of *Lolita* as a masterpiece that crowned all of Nabokov's work and undoubtedly superseded all that he wrote leads to an obvious distortion of the real perspective; and this is felt all the more strongly the more actively does the "grandmaster's" prose, which by its very nature is not reducible to some kind of artificially isolated dominant tendency, resist the distortion. It is impossible to interpret Nabokov by taking up a search for a main plot, predominant tonality, main type of hero, and so forth. This kind of approach necessarily reduces him to a certain stereotype, whereas the destruction of all stereotypes, including perhaps even stereotypical conceptions of what constituted "Nabokov's essence," always remained for him a fundamental artistic aim.

Nevertheless, the stereotype that Nabokov realized his authorial potential most fully in *Lolita*, and that consequently he should be examined through the prism of *Lolita* no matter which of his books is under discussion, has acquired exceptional stability. In this sense, Updike's judgments of Nabokov are very indicative. The central issue is not that *Lolita* is closer to Updike than all else in Nabokov's legacy. Rather, here are revealed the general characteristics of how Nabokov is perceived by his American literary contemporaries.

For all of them Nabokov proves to be closer as an artist who, in Updike's words in the anniversary issue of *TriQuarterly*, created in his "fictional universe . . . a stunning intensification of the ordinary one."[13] The Nabokov who is the creator of "aesthetic models" comparable to the "protective colorations in lepidoptera," the Nabokov plunged into metaphysical reflections about the phenomenon of man, seems too European. *Lolita* acquired significance as the epochal Nabokov text not, of course, on the strength of the fact that precisely it was the book that brought Nabokov fame among masses of readers, and not because of the scandal that accompanied its publication. It was truly a new word in literature, and echoes of this resounding word were not only numerous, but also long-lasting.

It is easy to note, of course, that *Lolita* was read and perceived chiefly from a very specific perspective, as a portrait of "a violent society" with its "wistful citizens desperately oversold on love." Such a view of *Lolita* is realized very consistently in Edward Albee's dramatic version, which was a noticeably schematized transposition of Nabokov's text, from which everything that has to do with existential categories, as opposed to everyday American life, is consistently eliminated. John Hawkes's novels of the early 1960s, *The Lime Twig* and *Second Skin*, contain unquestionable Nabokovian references; however, the shift in emphasis is so radical that in spite of the author's direct acknowledgements that Nabokov was one of his teachers, the associations that emerge are less with *Lolita* than with Henry Miller.

Updike's prose, outwardly also oriented toward Nabokov, in actuality imitates only those parts of *Lolita* that can be said (following more or less strained interpretation) to be organic to the American native tradition. Most of all Updike is attracted by the artfully reconstructed social background, the ability to reconstruct the specific atmosphere of suburbia, the exactitude of the details that impart expressiveness to such a character as Charlotte Haze with her "blatant bourgeois Bohemianism."[14] In his own books, beginning with *The Poorhouse Fair* (1959), this tradition finds an organic continuation that was helped along partly by Nabokov's lessons. It is clear, of course, that it is impossible to reduce Nabokov himself to this tradition, even if we are speaking only of *Lolita*. It was probably as a consequence of his internal resistance to such attempts that Nabokov was evasive when he was asked to admit that he belonged to American literature.

Actually, by nature of his gift and vision he is probably more of a foreigner to it. Incidentally, Updike, too, was clearly conscious of this when in his review of *The Defense* he quoted a widely known passage from *Speak, Memory*, "I discovered in nature the non-utilitarian delights that I sought in art," and acknowledged that "such a design eminently satisfies Nabokov's exacting criteria of artistic performance."[15] The key word in this context, is, of course, "non-utilitarian," with the very broad connotations that it has for Nabokov. The lacuna in the native tradition that Nabokov would doubtlessly be able to fill, were he really to become an American writer, was created precisely by an attachment to "non-utilitarian delights" that is not characteristic of this tradition.

This was not a flaw, but precisely a lacuna that appeared as the result of several stable characteristics of American culture that had elicited differing reactions since at least the end of the last century, when they were interpreted critically by Henry James, the first American advocate of "disinterested art." In America, James, who defended the rights of such art, which, as Updike said, "gives the happy impression of an oeuvre," always had more antagonists than allies. Updike's generation—writers who started in the mid-1950s, already after *Lolita* had made Nabokov famous—sensed the lacuna much more sharply than did even their direct predecessors in the generation of "Norman Mailer

and other homegrown cabbages." The appearance of a school of Nabokov's real students—who had accepted his views on literature, and not simply mastered certain peculiarities of his narrative style—could probably have filled in some elements missing from the native tradition, although it is doubtful that this would have changed its nature fundamentally. However, such a school did not appear. Strictly speaking, even faithful students did not appear. Updike, in any case, did not become one.

Rereading his old review of *The Defense*, one understands what divided him from Nabokov. The review was written soon after the publication of *The Centaur*, which to this day is Updike's best novel, and which won him indisputable literary prestige. The stylistics of *The Centaur*—which is a "novel as philosophy," something that in Updike's mind is opposed to the "novel as object" (which spurs us to "shuffle the pages and make our own plots")—has no analogue in anything that the exceptionally prolific Updike wrote afterwards. Echoes of Nabokov can be found even in *The Centaur*. In fact, Updike provokes this search when, attempting to ground his idea of "novel as philosophy," he admires how Nabokov "ingeniously toys with romantic triangles to produce more intricate patterns." But here he recalls *Pale Fire*, and adds: "His novels approach the condition of puzzles."[16] As such they may be considered unsurpassed, but Updike himself is drawn by other goals; and he mentions "heightened intellectual demands" as if in passing.

In *The Centaur* everything is subordinated to such demands, above all an extensive system of mythological parallels that link the story of the schoolteacher George Caldwell with the story of Chiron, who sacrifices his immortality. This artistic move aroused many debates in the past, inasmuch as it, too, seemed extremely unusual against the background of the "native tradition." But however one evaluates it, it is clear that it marked Updike's turn toward the kind of intellectualism that Nabokov firmly considered to be a mark of bad, if not simply counterfeit literature. It is enough to remember his scornful judgments of Thomas Mann.

Even if a "Nabokov school" existed, after *The Centaur* there is no point in speaking of Updike's participation in it. The very compliments with which Updike accompanied his analyses of Nabokov's "intricate patterns" sounded ambiguous. The same "intensity of intelligence" that he praised in connection with *The Defense* ultimately seems a doubtful discovery inasmuch as, in Updike's view, "the novel loses inevitability as it needs it most"—specifically, in the final scene. For Updike, it summons associations with the suicides of Anna Karenina, Emma Bovary, and Kirillov *(The Possessed)*, and in all these instances the reader perceives the suicides "as terrible but just—in the sense of fitting—events within the worlds the authors have evolved." Nothing of the kind can be said of Luzhin's departure into eternity. In Updike's understanding, it is but an effective move in a given chess game, an abstraction that "is less weighty than the human fictions it has conjured up."[17] In other words, Nabokov is presented with demands that are just only in the context of an

entirely different aesthetic, and his lack of correspondence with these demands is then called artistic weakness.

These same demands are formulated still more abrasively in Updike's article on *Ada*. Nabokov admitted that this article was "clever," yet in one of his interviews energetically protested that "Mr. Updike . . . absurdly suggests that my fictional character, bitchy and lewd Ada, is, I quote, 'in a dimension or two, Nabokov's wife'."[18] Against the background of sharply negative reviews of *Ada*, which several critics, following Morris Dickstein, called the most overpraised book of the decade, Updike's article genuinely seems analytical and well-considered, and its blunder could be considered a trivial one.

However, the reading of the novel proposed can hardly be seen as correct, no matter what attitude—be it delight or rejection—*Ada* provokes. It is capable of provoking both, but these evaluations should be founded on an understanding of the specific nature of this deliberately esoteric narrative. In Updike's case, they are founded on conceptions of literature that are simply inapplicable to *Ada*.

He does not, of course, attack Nabokov's authority, immediately declaring that he is "the best-equipped writer in the English-speaking world," and ending his article with the acknowledgment that Nabokov's art is magic, that is, art in the most exact sense of the word, since it "begins with magic." In *Ada* Updike finds much that is striking in its lifelike authenticity and exactitude of observation, all of which is the province of only an outstanding artist: the portrayal of the title heroine, the parodic accounts of Freud and Einstein, behind which one can see a brilliantly reconstructed type of consciousness, "of a very impressively costumed witch doctor" with his attempts "to analyze an internal combustion engine in terms of mana," and, finally, all of part V, where "sensations close to the edge of experience have been given equivalence in print."[19] However, one cannot help noticing that Updike's criterion is everywhere one and the same. In *Ada,* he is attracted only by what is "close to the edge of experience," only to "stretches and pages and phrases whose life derives from life." For Nabokov, however, such a derivation from and correlation with "life," the general recognizability of created scenes and characters, is by no means the main concern. *Ada* is his most consistent attempt to create "an art now become pure and abstract, and therefore genuine," and, having touched on this basic artistic task of Nabokov's, Updike, amid all his reservations, is in the end compelled to admit that, in his view, this task is erroneously formulated, and, in principle, hardly feasible.

On this point Updike's article contains a discussion that is especially important for understanding why Nabokov remained an outsider with regard to the native tradition, and in fact hardly influenced it no matter how highly critics touted his achievements, especially those of the 1960s generation. Updike does not argue with these critics about Nabokov's significance as an artist; he argues with the assertion that Nabokov laid the path along which writers who have undergone their apprenticeship with him should have

moved. "Is art a game?"—writes Updike. "Nabokov stakes his career on it . . . I think not. Art is part game, part grim erotic tussle with Things as They Are; the boxes must have holes where reality can look out and readers can look in."[20] But Nabokov's prose is like boxes in a Minimal Art show, which are "perfectly self-contained, detached from even the language of their composition." One can be delighted by them; in their apparent simplicity they demand the highest virtuosity from the master who created them; however, strictly speaking, they are not capable of arousing any feelings in the recipient, except enjoyment of the author's aimless inventiveness. *Ada,* with the exception of "phrases whose life derives from life," is for Updike just such an example.

One could consider such an evaluation to be the result of a reading that is predetermined only by the peculiarities of Updike's own creative individuality and writing interests. These are discernible, of course, as is always the case when a writer is judged not by a critic, but by another writer who already has worked out his own particular understanding of literature. But Updike is too imposing a figure in contemporary American prose, as well as a writer who has long been regarded as the undisputed, as well as the most promising, of Nabokov's successors. Furthermore, in his article, *Ada* is only a pretext for the expression of the essence of his divergence from Nabokov, and not only with the writer Nabokov, but with all literature stemming from the notion of art as a game. In this context, Nabokov is a kind of signifying personage, a prose writer who took to perfection and to the limit a specific artistic tendency that turns out to be unacceptable for Updike, who in the end feels himself to be an heir of the native tradition.

He even speaks as a representative of the native tradition when, in the conclusion of his article, he presents his main criticism to Nabokov: "If Nature is an artifact, however, there must be, if not an Artist, at least a kind of raw reality beneath or behind it, and the most daring and distressing quality of his novels is their attempt to rub themselves bare, to display their own vestments of artifice and then to remove them."[21] Of course, he is not talking about a writer's obligation to portray the external world faithfully, inspired by the example of Zola, who was attractive to "homegrown cabbages" such as Mailer; Updike always treated such prose sarcastically. Reality is a problem for Updike, as it is for every serious artist who is aware that it is impossible to exclude from an understanding of artistic reality everything that relates to its perception, which in a work of literature can turn out to be decidedly subjective, as a result of which the contours of the external world become hardly identifiable. For Updike Nabokov is unacceptable not because these contours in *Ada* can scarcely be guessed at, but for another reason: "to get to them we traverse too wide a waste of facetious, airy, side-slipped semi-reality."[22] This semi-reality is dehumanized too consistently in Nabokov for it not to seem in the end that the whole novel is the product of pure authorial imagination that has nothing to do with "raw reality," even though without it, as Updike sees it, literature simply cannot exist.

Three years later, reviewing *Transparent Things*, Updike was to express this same idea even more harshly: "His aesthetic of gravity-fooling confronts us with a fiction that purposely undervalues its own humanistic content, that openly scorns the psychology and sociology that might bring with them an unfoolable gravity. Joyce also loved puns, and Proust was as lopsided an emotional monster as Humbert Humbert. But these older writers did submit their logomachy and their maimed private lives to a kind of historical commonality; the Europe of the epics and the cathedrals spoke through them. The impression created by Nabokov's novels in Russian, I am told, differs from that given by his spectacular works in English; he can be compared to Dostoevsky and Tolstoy in a way in which he cannot be compared with Thoreau and Twain. In his post-*Lolita* novels, especially, he seems more illusionist than seer. Though he offers us sensations never before verbally induced, and performs stunts that lift him right off the page, we are more amused than convinced."[23]

Updike, it is true, is quick to specify that "the failing may be ours"; however, such elucidations have nothing to do with literary polemics. As usual, the polemic itself is accompanied by an obvious bias, according to which the opponent's position is interpreted. In his Russian books, Nabokov is of course not comparable either to Dostoevsky or even to Tolstoy (whom he valued extremely highly) not so much in terms of his literary significance, but above all because he is a writer of a different time and an entirely different artistic vision. Furthermore, both Thoreau and Twain remained completely foreign to Nabokov, and the impossibility of comparing *Pale Fire* either with *Walden* or with *Life on the Mississippi* does not at all mean that Nabokov's prose is a secondary phenomenon and inferior within this context: it simply belongs to another tradition, another literature.

Its main sources are Russian Symbolism and the phantasmagorical world of Gogol; and the role of "prophet" would be absolutely unnatural to a writer who inherited such an aesthetic. In the end, this role is not at all an obligatory one in literature: while natural for Tolstoy or Solzhenitsyn, it would have seemed no more than posturing in writers who were, like Nabokov, primarily endowed with an aesthetic perception of the world, which does not prevent them from writing books that express reality both profoundly and authentically—such as *The Gift*, *Lolita*, *Pnin*, and probably everything else that came from Nabokov's pen.

To call what Nabokov created void of humanist content, and Nabokov himself a literary illusionist, can be done only if the values of another aesthetic are acknowledged to be the normative ones, an aesthetic for which psychology, sociology, and other extra-literary factors create "unfoolable gravity." Essentially, Updike's criticism of Nabokov turned out to be an example of the kind of tendentiousness that is more common in those interpretations of the

Nabokov phenomenon that were proposed by his Russian commentators after it became possible to discuss him without crude ideological bias (see "Literary Return to Russia" in this volume). In his criticisms Updike is, of course, much more careful, but the course and direction of his thoughts, especially in the article on *Ada*, are exactly like those of the majority of Russian critics who accused Nabokov—above all the English-speaking Nabokov—of esotericism, aimless wordplay, and so on. Their similar passages sound like an undisguised reproof to a writer who, from their point of view, is squandering his brilliant gift for no reason. On the other hand, in a comparatively recent article that appeared in the Nabokov issue of *Magazine littéraire* (September 1986), Updike gives the striking plasticity of Nabokov's language its due for the unique effects it achieves in *Pale Fire* and *Ada*. Axiologically opposed to each other, these interpretations are nevertheless almost identical in their approach to Nabokov, especially to his last books. No humanistic content is found in them, and if one agrees with this, it is not so important whether they are evaluated positively or negatively. In both cases, Nabokov's last works appear to be written exclusively for a critic who finds it convenient to demonstrate the merit of his own methodology on such material, but not for a reader who seeks in literature some trace "of that which exists."

But such a reading is not determined by the character of Nabokov's texts. It is the result of a particular type of aberration, created by an adherence to an aesthetic norm and to a canon that were rejected by Nabokov himself or that underwent very substantial reworking by him, to say the least. If one has not acknowledged the sovereign right of "grandmaster Nabokov" to create an artistic universe according to his own design, one can hardly describe that universe correctly, much less evaluate it. It will always look too unfamiliar and odd against the background of dominant models, since Nabokov had other literary aspirations.

These had almost nothing in common with the American native tradition, and this mutual foreignness had to be recognized sooner or later, contrary to all assurances that Nabokov is the greatest American writer since the Second World War. Updike's articles attested to the fundamental nature of this divergence, and in this sense they are much more interesting than simply as a statement about the disparity in the literary views professed by two great and superficially related writers. In reality, Nabokov, who lived in America for more than a quarter of a century and created there a reputation that is now acknowledged by more than a narrow circle of connoisseurs, was more like a foreigner in relation to American culture than its own permanent property, and did not create a tradition that might have continued in post-Nabokovian prose. Rather, by means of his English books he exacerbated the sensation of a lacuna that was always present in American culture, and at the same time created a stimulus so that the lacuna could one day be filled—not only with his

own novels, but with that which his true followers and pupils will write in the future.

Aleksei Zverev
Translated from the Russian by Anna K. Primrose

NOTES

1. Updike, "Grandmaster Nabokov," *The New Republic*, September 26, 1964; rpt. Updike, *Assorted Prose*, p. 318.
2. *Voprosy literatury*, no. 2, 1989, p. 235.
3. Updike, *Assorted Prose*, p. 318.
4. Ibid., p. 319.
5. Boyd, 1991, p. 608.
6. *Inostrannaia literatura*, no. 12, 1977, p. 213.
7. Updike, *Assorted Prose*, pp. 320, 326.
8. Updike, *Picked-Up Pieces*, p. 197.
9. Ibid., p. 194.
10. Updike, *Assorted Prose*, pp. 320–21.
11. Ibid., pp. 326, 327.
12. Updike, *Picked-Up Pieces*, p. 191.
13. Reprinted in ibid., pp. 220–22.
14. Updike, *Assorted Prose*, p. 321.
15. Ibid., p. 325.
16. Updike, *Picked-Up Pieces*, p. 22.
17. Updike, *Assorted Prose*, pp. 326, 327.
18. Boyd, 1991, p. 567.
19. Updike, *Picked-Up Pieces*, pp. 208, 209.
20. Ibid., p. 208.
21. Ibid., p. 210.
22. Ibid., p. 202.
23. Ibid., p. 215.

NABOKOV AND USPENSKY

The connection between Nabokov and the Russian occultist Petr Dem'ianovich Uspensky (1878–1947; known in English as P.D. Ouspensky) is speculative because Nabokov left no published testimony suggesting Uspensky was important for him. What warrants speaking of a possible influence, however, is that Nabokov shared with Uspensky several unusual ideas, including the seminal redefinition of "artifice" and "nature" as synonyms for each other on the basis of mimicry among insects (see the article "Nature and Artifice" in this volume). The high degree of congruence between Nabokov's formulations and those of Uspensky suggests that his thinking about mimicry may have been derived from or at least influenced by them. The specific arguments Uspensky

made are unique, and had not appeared previously in the history of speculation about mimicry in nature. (In general, however, this view is a variant of the theological "argument from design" that can be traced at least as far back as the Bible [Romans 1: 20], and that has been popular to the present day; see also the article on "Nabokov and Evreinov" in the present volume.)[1]

As he acknowledges in *Speak, Memory* and elsewhere, Nabokov was passionately interested in lepidoptera ever since he was a boy; he collected and studied them throughout his life and read voraciously about them. It is thus inevitable that he would have encountered Darwinian explanations of mimicry because the phenomenon was discovered by naturalists studying butterflies shortly after the publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859. They immediately enlisted their findings in support of Darwin's views, with the result that, despite various elaborations over the years, survival of the fittest has remained a commonplace of scientific writing about butterflies ever since.[2] Darwin's theory of evolution was also attacked as soon as it appeared by those who saw it as undermining the view that all existence is a product of divine creative will, an attitude that also survives to the present day.[3] Because Nabokov must have been familiar with these polemics, it is important to acknowledge the possibility that he could have developed his views about the metaphysical implications of mimicry entirely on his own.

Petr Uspensky's place in the history of culture is as a thinker whose ideas influenced a surprisingly wide range of major figures in Russia and Europe during and after the First World War.[4] In simplest terms, Uspensky's ideas can be seen as part of the broad stream of syncretic mysticism that appeared in Europe during the last quarter of the nineteenth century with the "theosophy" of Elena Petrovna Blavatskaia ("Madame Blavatsky"). This fed into the revival of religious, philosophical, and mystical speculation in Russia around the turn of the century, where it left a profound influence on many major writers, artists, and musicians of the day—including Andrei Bely, Vasily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, Aleksei Kruchenykh, Aleksandr Scriabin, and others (the influence was also great outside Russia of course, among the Surrealists, for example, and on Yeats). Uspensky's ideas, like all branches of this broad trend, centered on the nature of the relationship between the material world and "higher dimensions" of being and the consequence this has or should have for man's life. More specifically, Uspensky argued that man's normal existence consists of mechanical responses to various random events. But by cultivating a higher form of consciousness that gives insight into the "fourth dimension," man can transcend his state and thereby also serve a realm higher than his own.[5] In contrast to such movements as theosophy and anthroposophy, Uspensky's system does not include staggeringly detailed descriptions of otherworldly realms, and is in general much more restrained in its speculations about them. This feature of Uspensky's ideas might have appealed to Nabokov and not jarred too strongly with his own tentative intuitions about the otherworld (see the article "The Otherworld").

Uspensky's discussion of mimicry appears in the first chapter of one of his major treatises, *A New Model of the Universe* (1931, 1934), and constitutes his fundamental illustration of the proposition that many natural phenomena have never been properly understood by science.[6] He begins by describing instances of spectacular mimetic disguise among insects, including butterflies "whose folded wings represent a large, dry leaf," and dwells in some detail on examples that he observed himself during his travels. He then turns to the attempt that science has made to explain the phenomenon by invoking the principle of the survival of the fittest, and rejects it because of the implausibility that the perfection of the mimic's imitation of a model could have been arrived at by "thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands of repeated accidents."[7] Although Uspensky's critique of Darwinian explanations of mimicry is more detailed than Nabokov's, he comes to the same conclusion: "The principle of utilitarianism ha[s] to be abandoned" (44). And like Nabokov, Uspensky makes it axiomatic that artistic deception operates throughout nature: "the general tendency of Nature [is] toward decorativeness, 'theatricalness,' the tendency to be or to appear different from what she really is at a given time and place." This applies to butterflies and other insects as well, all of whom "are dressed up and disguised; they all wear masks and fancy dresses. Their whole life is passed on the stage. The tendency of their life is not to be themselves, but to resemble something else, a green leaf, a bit of moss, a shiny stone" (44). Darwin's idea of the survival of the fittest thus cannot be Nature's direct aim and "is attained only by the way, only casually"; what is "permanent and intentional is the tendency towards decorativeness, the endless disguise, the endless masquerade, by which Nature lives."

For Uspensky, the phenomenon of mimicry is ultimately "a miracle" that implies a transcendent "plan, intention and aim" in nature (45). Although this abstract formulation comes very close to Nabokov's views, it is important to note that the details of what Uspensky means by "plan, intention and aim," to say nothing of his discussions of organized insect life on the pages that follow, go far beyond anything that Nabokov would probably have been willing to entertain. Uspensky interprets mimicry among insects as pointing to the "fourth dimension" (which is a concept that he did not invent, and which has a long and complex history in turn-of-the-century thought), and as evidence for an impulse in the cosmos whose aim is to produce a being capable of achieving transcendence. By contrast, when Nabokov speculates about higher forms of consciousness than man's, he typically does no more than sketch possibilities; in one interview, for example, he condenses them into the following laconic form: "Time without consciousness—lower animal world; time with consciousness—man; consciousness without time—some still higher state" (*SO* 30). There is also no question that Nabokov's knowledge of the details of mimicry among lepidoptera far exceeds Uspensky's more casual observations.[8]

Other parallels between Nabokov and Uspensky include their ideas about consciousness in relation to motion, space, and time. In the lecture "The Art of Literature and Commonsense" and in *Speak, Memory* (50, 218, 296–97, 301), Nabokov suggests that the processes constituting life are the source of man's experience of time, and that through the epiphanic experience he calls "inspiration" or "cosmic synchronization" the true artist can enter atemporal space, transcend time, and catch a glimmer of what may lie beyond death. This resembles Uspensky's description of the relation of the "fourth dimension" to time and motion: "Motion, growth, 'becoming,' which go on in the world around us are no more real than the movement of the house as we drive by, or the movement of trees and fields past the window of a fast-moving railway carriage. . . . Movement goes on inside us, and it produces the illusion of movement around us. . . . if a man were able at once to embrace with his mind all that ever entered his perception and all that is never clearly illumined by thought . . . then a man might perhaps find himself in the midst of a *motionless universe*, containing simultaneously all that usually lies for a man in the remote depths of memory, in the past; all that lies at a great distance from him; all that lies in the future." The last part of this formulation recalls especially clearly Delalande's "all-seeing eye" in *The Gift* (310). Nabokov's image in the first lines of *Speak, Memory* of the "commonsensical" view that human "existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness" is very close to one that Uspensky uses when explaining that "the sensation of motion in time (and there is no motion that is not in time) arises in us because we look at the world through a narrow slit, as it were. . . . This incomplete sensation of time (of the fourth dimension)—sensation through a slit—gives us the sensation of motion, i.e., creates an illusion of motion, which is not actually there, and instead of which, in reality, there is only an *extension* in a direction we are unable to imagine." Finally, Uspensky's speculations about "*extension in time*" being "extension into an unknown *space*," as a result of which time is the "*fourth dimension of space*," recall Nabokov's idea about the possible relations among time, space, thought and higher dimensions of being: "if, in the spiral unwinding of things, space warps into something akin to time, and time, in its turn, warps into something akin to thought, then surely, another dimension follows—a special Space maybe, not the old one, we trust, unless spirals become vicious circles again" (*SM* 301).[9]

Such parallels suggest that Nabokov's ideas about artifice in nature as well as about time, space and motion can be seen as part of a general trend in Western thought to which Uspensky (and other figures in turn-of-the-century Russian culture) also belong. This obviously complicates the issue of determining influence. The only real evidence for the possibility that Nabokov derived ideas directly from Uspensky remains the closeness of some of their central formulations, but, as we have seen, even here there are significant divergences. Nabokov could have heard something of Uspensky's beliefs before leaving Russia in 1919 because Uspensky lectured in St. Petersburg

from approximately 1909 to 1913 and again in 1915; by this time Nabokov was already passionate about lepidoptera.[10] Nabokov could also have heard about him in the Crimea, where he sought refuge from the Bolsheviks with his family during the Civil War and where he apparently evinced some interest in mysticism.[11] Most easily, of course, Nabokov simply could have read Uspensky's *A New Model of the Universe* after it was published in English in 1931 and again in 1934.

Vladimir E. Alexandrov

Notes

1. Sisson, 1979, pp. 138–40, in the context of a discussion of Nabokov's parallels with H.G. Wells, points out a resemblance between Nabokov's ideas about mimicry and "the apparent conflict between Darwinian natural selection and the sense of beauty" as expressed by the eponymous protagonist in Wells's novel *Ann Veronica, A Modern Love Story* (1909). See "Nabokov and Some . . . English Writers.'
2. Carpenter and Ford, p. 5, explain that the first Darwinian explanation of mimicry was given in 1862 on the example of butterflies from the Amazon River valley. See also Portmann, pp. 70–74, and Wickler, pp. 7–8.
3. Futuyma defends evolutionary theory, and summarizes contemporary American "creationist" arguments against Darwinian evolution. Simpson, who was Professor of Natural Science at New College in Edinburgh at the beginning of this century, provides a better informed and subtler "creationist" argument for natural phenomena. Although he does not discuss mimicry, he comes close to speaking of natural phenomena in terms of esthetic categories when he concludes that "purely mechanical" explanations for them are inadequate (pp. 21–22) because "Nature is the orderly guise of the ultimate Spiritual Causality" (p. 248). It is interesting to note that Gould, pp. 20–21, criticizes using "ideal design" in nature to support evolution because this "mimics the postulated action of an omnipotent creator. Odd arrangements and funny solutions are the proof of evolution—paths that a sensible God would never tread." It is of course unclear why Gould would believe that he knows what could possibly be in a "sensible God's" mind.
4. A brief overview of Uspensky's life and works can be found in the brochure *Remembering Pyotr Demianovich Ouspensky*; Reyner's is a more detailed study by an ardent admirer.
5. Reyner, p. 2.
6. *A New Model of the Universe*, pp. 42–43; the first edition was published in English in 1931. According to *Remembering Pyotr Demianovich Ouspensky*, p. 18, Uspensky completed the book that was to become known in English as *A New Model of the Universe* in 1915. Hereafter, all page references to the second edition of the English translation will be given in the text.
7. When Uspensky's book was first published, evolutionary biologists did not in fact invoke such large numbers of genetic mutations (what he calls "repeated accidents") to account for close resemblances between mimics and models; scientists still maintain that major differences can be effected by a change in a single gene (Carpenter and Ford, p. 106). Uspensky's versions of other Darwinian arguments are also inaccurate by the

standards of contemporary evolutionary biology, but this topic is beyond the scope of the present study. It is worth noting that Nabokov consciously opposed his own ideas to reigning evolutionary theory when in *Speak, Memory*, p. 301, he spoke of acquired characteristics in Lamarckian terms (see my "A Note on Nabokov's Anti-Darwinism").

8. Karges, e.g. pp. 17, 30, recognizes that butterflies are connected with the transcendent in Nabokov's *oeuvre* but does not pursue the implications of this conclusion.
9. *Tertium Organum*, pp. 171–72, 32 (this is probably Uspensky's best-known and most influential work and was published twice in Russia before the Revolution, in 1912 and in 1916; the first two English translations appeared in 1920). Some of the other tantalizing parallels between Uspensky's ideas and Nabokov's include art as a vehicle for understanding the noumenal world via phenomena (p. 131), the occult implications of electricity (p. 116), and the possible perspective of a higher-dimensional being onto a lower world (chapters 9 and 10), which is relevant for *Laughter in the Dark* and *Transparent Things*.
10. I have not been able to ascertain the specific subjects of all of Uspensky's lectures; thus it is not certain that he mentioned butterflies in St. Petersburg before the Revolution. In *A New Model of the Universe*, p. 60, Uspensky indicates that he wrote the chapter in which he discusses mimicry between 1912–1929. Nabokov mentions that he became interested in butterflies at the "age of seven," which would mean in 1906 (*SM* 119).
11. Field, 1986, p. 53, quotes from Vladimir Pohl's published account describing how he tried to guide the young Nabokov's thoughts toward mysticism. See also Boyd, 1990, pp. 152–59. That Nabokov was familiar with various occult teachings (without necessarily accepting them, of course) is obvious from *Speak, Memory*, p. 20, his parodies of them in *The Eye*, 1930, and his utilization of Gnostic topoi in *The Defense, Invitation to a Beheading*, "Perfection," and other works.

NATURE AND ARTIFICE

One of the most striking features of Nabokov's art is that the same "coincidences" of meaning and detail in a given work can be interpreted in two radically different ways—either as a literary model of fate or as the author's underscoring the artificiality of his text. Humbert's reading *Who's Who in the Limelight* in *Lolita* (31) is a case in point. The fact that he finds references in it to Quilty, Lolita, and a phrase she once uttered can be seen as either fateful coincidence or as Nabokov's revealing his presence as authorial manipulator. The latter reading necessarily implies that patterns and coincidences of the sort we find throughout Nabokov's fiction simply do not occur in "real life" and that by stressing them he is denying his texts' verisimilitude. The second facet of Nabokov's art that leads to the same confrontation between opposed readings is his Romantic irony—his characteristic practice of having the author intrude into his texts, both directly, as in the conclusion of *Bend Sinister*, and

anagrammatically, as "Vivian Darkbloom" in *Lolita* (in *Who's Who in the Limelight* and elsewhere).[1] It is precisely in connection with these two characteristics of Nabokov's fiction that reading it in the context of his discursive writings is most illuminating. *Speak, Memory* is filled with Nabokov's detailed discussions of the patterning he found in his own life and in the lives of his ancestors; furthermore, like some of the positive characters in his novels, Nabokov clearly implies that his existence bears the tell-tale marks of a transmundane agency. (The false patterns or coincidences that flawed characters like Hermann in *Despair* perceive are another matter entirely; these are in fact solipsistic projections rather than insights implying a higher reality. The reader's task in *Despair* is to sort out Hermann's delusions from the patterning concealed in the novel's world by its author-deity.)

But Nabokov's related arguments and implications go even further. In interviews as well as in his autobiography Nabokov insists that the entire world of nature is also filled with patterning that implies it was fashioned by some higher consciousness: from mimicry among insects to "the popular entitlements of procreation"—all is the product of ingenious and, Nabokov stresses, nonutilitarian and deceptive craftsmanship (*SO* 11). In other words, Nabokov's non-fictional writings show that he completely redefines the terms "nature" and "artifice" into synonyms for each other. If any one idea can be considered to be "the key" to Nabokov's art, this is it.

In light of this crucial redefinition, Nabokov's textual patterns and intrusions into his fictional texts emerge as imitations of the otherworld's formative role with regard to man and nature: *the metaliterary is camouflage for and a model of the metaphysical.* The remarkable resistance of some readers to even considering this possibility is illustrated well by the critic who suggested substituting the word "art" for the term "hereafter" in the narrator's speculation about the nature of the realm beyond death on the penultimate page of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (which reads, "The hereafter may be the full ability of consciously living in any chosen soul, in any number of souls").[2] Clearly, the kind of intuitive faith in an otherworld that Nabokov manifests in his writings has been perceived as unmodish in the context of "modern literature" and has, therefore, been dismissed as unacceptable by many of his readers. Another critic has approached Nabokov through an explicit, a priori opposition of "reality" to "fictionality" that betrays Nabokov's conception of the naturalness of artifice. Speaking of those novels by Nabokov that he considers weakest, he concludes that the "constructed fictional world [in them], however ingenious, is hardly allowed sufficient vitality to give the dialectic between fiction and 'reality' the vigorous to-and-fro energy which it requires: a play of competing ontologies cannot fully engage us when one of the competitors, the invented world of fiction, too often seems like intellectual contrivance."[3] Nabokov's point is of course precisely that the so-called natural world appears to have been "contrived" by some higher intelligence. (See also the articles on "The

Otherworld," "Nabokov and Uspensky," and "Nabokov and Evreinov" in this volume.)

In most general terms, Nabokov's characteristic aesthetic practices resurrect the Romantic idea that the artist is God's rival and that man's artistic creations are analogues to God's natural world. Thus Novalis could state that "it is idle chatter to seek to distinguish between nature and art" because "art is nature" and "nature possesses an artistic instinct." Schelling makes the same point in terms of the Romantic metaphor about the organic character of art: "If we are interested in pursuing as far as possible the construction, the internal disposition, the relations and entanglements of a plant or, generally speaking, of any organic being, how much more strongly ought we to be attracted by the recognition of these same entanglements and relations in that plant, so much more highly organized and bound up in itself, that is called a work of art." The reason why this parallelism should exist, as Friedrich Ast, a disciple of Friedrich Schlegel and Schelling, puts it is that "artistic production" and "divine production" "are one, and God is revealed in the poet as he produces corporally in the visible universe."[4]

Nabokov was obviously aware of this conception, as he revealed when he stated in a lecture that "art is a divine game . . . because this is the element in which man comes nearest to God through becoming the true creator in his own right" (*LRL* 106). The importance of this remark is that it gives the lie to such unhappy critical notions as that he practiced "aggressive antinaturalism" in his fictions.[5] A more accurate formulation is that Nabokov's conception of what constitutes an appropriate formal embodiment for the "natural artifice" he saw in the world differs from the relatively shapeless or eclectic aesthetic—often anti-Classical in its origins and focus—that the German Romantics and their followers called "organic form" (as, for example, Coleridge in his lectures on Shakespeare). Nabokov's form also seems "unnatural" because it differs from that found in much of the established later nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary canon (similarly produced under the influence of Romantic ideas), which is still often confused with "reality" and thus with what is "natural."[6] But this does not make his artificial form any less natural within his own worldview.[7]

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NOTES

1. Tammi, 1985, pp. 320–41, surveys in detail this and related authorial intrusions and markers in Nabokov's novels.
2. Bader, pp. 14–15.
3. Alter, 1975, p. 182.
4. Novalis, Schelling, and Ast are quoted by Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, pp. 168–69. For another overview of this idea, see Wellek, pp. 17, 47, 76, 136.

5. Rabinowitz, p. 263.
6. A famous discussion of this problem is Jakobson's "O khudozhestvennom realizme" ("On Artistic Realism," 1921).
7. Pifer, 1980, p. 126, comes to a similar conclusion from a different direction.

NIKOLKA PERSIK

Readers of Nobel Prize winner Romain Rolland's ponderous *Bildungsroman, Jean Christophe,* and of his subsequent pro-communist works cannot but wonder why the young Vladimir Nabokov should have decided to translate his *Colas Breugnon. Colas Breugnon* is, however, a maverick in Rolland's corpus. After the long constraint of *Jean Christophe*, Rolland felt the need for "free Gallic gaiety" and even a little irreverence.[1] Having abandoned his initial adherence to socialism and his subsequent attraction to syndicalism, he was at a stage where he prized "clear individual intelligence," rather than "confused collective thought."[2] He returned to his native Clamecy in the spring of 1913 for the first time since his youth and was "possessed" by the voices of his Burgundian ancestors. Under the irresistible dictation of their hearty, wine-loving voices, he began to write *Colas Breugnon* in April. Although work on the novel was interrupted by a serious illness, *Colas* was completed by the end of the summer[3] and set in type in early 1914, but Rolland's publisher objected to the excessively "freethinking" posture of the book, especially to the hilarious and cogent (if somewhat drunken) objections to the Trinity and the mockery of the adoration of (rival) relics in the chapter "Le curé de Brèves" ("The Curate of Brèves").[4] *Colas Breugnon* was finally published in 1919. Nabokov and his father read the novel soon after it appeared.

Colas Breugnon is the first-person narration of a year in the life of a fiercely independent Burgundian freeholder living in the reign of Louis XIII (1610–1643), who successively loses his wife, his house, and workshop and, ultimately, his freedom when, having broken his leg in a pigheaded attempt to rebuild, he is obliged to live with his daughter and son-in-law. Through it all, Colas remains cheerful and hearty in a rather Hobbity way: he is wise, tolerant, charitable, and commonsensical, never losing his gaiety or his memory and enjoyment of what he has seen, sensed, smelled, smoked, and scarfed (Colas' style is catching). Colas is not merely free and *frondeur* (critical and rebellious), he is also an artist, a sculptor of complex Burgundian armoires, staircases, and moldings, decorated with nymphs and vines and heavy clusters of fruit. The defacing and violation of these carved "children" by their "owner," le Seigneur Philibert, is a particularly painful loss.

Nabokov was attracted by Colas' artist's eye, his craftsman's passion, and the verbal profusion through which he expresses his joy in creating, "la joie de la main exacte" ("the pleasure of the accurate hand"): "Qu'il est plaisant de se

trouver, son outil dans les mains devant son établi, sciant, coupant, rabotant, rognant, chantournant, chevillant, limant, tripotant, triturant la matière belle et ferme qui se révolte et plie, le bois de noyer doux et gras, qui palpite sous la main comme un râble de fée, les corps roses et blonds, les corps bruns et dorés des nymphs de nos bois, dépouillés de leurs voiles, par la cognée tranchés!" (CB 20). ("How good it is to stand before my workbench with a tool in my hand, drawing, cutting, planing, shaving, carving curves, pegging, filing, pawing and squeezing the fine, firm wood, which resists and then yields; soft, rich walnut, fluttering beneath my hand like a fairy's rump, the rosy or blond bodies, the brown and golden bodies of our wood nymphs, stripped of their veils, felled by the axe.")[5] (In his effort to create an alliterative series of "p's", Nabokov transforms the fairy's rump into shoulders, an uncharacteristic bit of prudery: ". . . telo oreshnika, nezhnoe, zhirnoe, trepeshchushchee pod rukoi, podobno plecham charodeiki."[6] Rolland's English-language translator, Katherine Miller, settles for unspecified "fairy flesh" [p. 14].)

The major attraction of *Colas Breugnon* for Nabokov was neither its plot nor its hero, but the challenge of its extraordinary language. *Colas* was "a Vesuvius of words, an eruption of the old-French lexicon . . . an uninterrupted game of rhythmic figures, assonances and internal rhymes, chains of alliterations, rows of synonyms."[7] Somewhat rashly, the twenty-one-year-old Nabokov bet his father that he could translate the novel, preserving the rhythm of its language.[8] But the prosody of *Colas Breugnon* is extremely complicated and difficult to translate. It is reminiscent of the works of the "Grands Rhétoriqueurs" who wrote in the service of the Duke of Burgundy one hundred and fifty years before the period in which *Colas Breugnon* is set. The effect of the texts of the "Rhétoriqueurs" resembles that of late medieval tapestries. They generally begin with a prologue in the first person, wherein "l'acteur," a persona of the poet, speaks in prose and tells how he fell asleep and had a vision enacted by allegorical characters. These personifications discourse in verse on contemporary moral and political conflicts and employ a variety of line and strophic patterns, rhymes, alliterations, internal rhymes, homophones, etc. The phonological and semantic effects created by these accumulations are meant to create a mimesis of concord or discord. Many stanzas end with one or several folk proverbs. The prose, characterized by lengthy periods sometimes extending to ten or fifteen lines, is metrically more varied and complex than the symmetrical octosyllables and decasyllables used in the verse.

It is not clear whether Rolland actually knew the works of the "Rhétoriqueurs," which were not easily accessible in 1913, but the essential characteristics of their prose were subsequently used to comic effect by Rabelais, whose novels serve as the avowed model for *Colas Breugnon.* In the 1564 edition, Rabelais' "Cinquième livre" is followed by an epigram signed "Nature Quitte"[9] ("Quits Nature" [as in "we are quits"]) which applies to *Colas Breugnon* as well: "Rabelais est il mort? Voici encor un livre. / Non, sa meilleure part a repris ses espritz / Pour nous faire present de l'un de ses escrits / Qui le

rend entre tous immortel, et fait vivre."[10] ("Is Rabelais defunct? Here is another book. / No, the best part of him has regained its spirits. / To present us with another of his works / Which makes him among all immortal and alive.") Similarly, Rolland places a passage from the "Cinquième Livre" at the end of his *Colas*: after at last reaching the oracle of the "holy bottle," Frère Jean and his companions all begin to speak in rhythm and in rhyme—as do Colas Breugnon and his *compagnons*.

The complexities of the vocabulary and rhythmic structure of *Colas Breugnon* present unusual problems and opportunities for a translator. Rendering its "old French lexicon" demanded (and justified) one of Nabokov's favorite activities: delving into Dahl's great dictionary of the Russian language, enriching still further his already considerable fund of abstruse Russian words. As he had done in his translation of *Alice in Wonderland,* Nabokov opted to Russianize *Colas Breugnon,* beginning with the title. *Colas* (a diminutive of Nicolas), becomes *Nikolka*, and *Breugnon* (in French the name of a fruit rather like a nectarine) becomes *Persik,* the Russian word for "peach." M. L. Lozinsky, whose translation of *Colas Breugnon* is generally considered by his Soviet peers to be a masterpiece,[11] keeps the original title and uses notes to explain it as well as other terms probably unknown to the average Soviet reader. Contrary to his later practice in *Eugene Onegin,* Nabokov includes no notes at all, and he uses those provided in the French edition to create substitute formulations. He frequently drops classical allusions: "Janus bifrons" disappears; "Achate" becomes "drug trud" (NP 17). When he cannot find easy Russian equivalents, Nabokov also sometimes omits French expressions which, although still generally understood, are no longer in common use (e.g.: "de fières lampées" [CB 44]: "great gulps," "healthy swigs," "huge swallows").

Rolland's rhythmic prose is based on phonetic patterns which are typical of French, for example, the sound which appears in the most frequent French infinitive form (*er*), in past participles (*é, ée*), in many nouns ending in *é* or *ée,* and in third-person imperfect endings (*ait, aient*). Faced with translating it, Nabokov applies the principle which he was to use many years later to transpose his own rhythmic figures, assonances and alliterations into another language. He creates an overall sense of rhythmic prose rather than attempting to reproduce specific patterns of sounds. (One wonders: might Nabokov's own highly alliterative future style have been influenced by this early exercise?) *Nikolka Persik* successfully, even ingeniously, transposes *Colas Breugnon*'s French cadences into Russian. Lozinsky's are, however, more like French ones because he is careful to avoid multi-syllabic present participles and oblique cases (particularly plural possessives and instrumentals) which create un-French strings of weak polysyllables in Russian.

It is, of course, sometimes possible to directly replace small patterns of sounds in the source language with different ones in the target language, and Nabokov takes frequent advantage of opportunities to do so. "La canaille des camps et celle de la cour" (CB 27, "camp and court rabble") becomes

"razboiniki ogorodnye i blagorodnye" (NP 24). ". . . des roses et des gratte-culs, des choses vues et lues, et sues, et eues, vécues!" (CB 15) is rendered as ". . . rozy i plevely; tysiacha raznykh veshchei, vidennykh, chitannykh, vpitannykh,—i perezhitykh!" (NP 11). (This is a good example of the *longueurs* created by Russian participles; a literal English rendering would give "roses and hips; things seen and read, and known, and owned and lived.")

To compensate for French cadences unavoidably sacrificed to Russian sense, Nabokov intensifies phonetic repetition wherever possible: "Hai, comme elle se démène, notre Marie-manque-de-grace, remplissant la maison de son corps efflanqué, furetant, grimpant, grinchant, grommelant, grognant, grondant de la cave au grenier, pourchassant la poussière et la tranquillité" (CB 15–16). ("Ai, kak ona mechetsia, rukami mashet—Masha uglovataia nasha! Ves' dom napolniaet telom svoim dolgoviazym, ryshchet, khlopochet, rychit, burchit, grokhochet, gonet pyl' i pokoi" NP 12; "How she scurries about, our Mary-empty-of-grace—filling the whole house with her skinny body, poking around, climbing, grousing, grumbling, bitching, scolding, from cellar to attic, rooting out dust and tranquility.") Here, Nabokov picks up a sound cluster and a semi-pun ("mashet/Masha . . . nasha"), but loses the play on "Marie, pleine de grâce" ("Mary, full of grace," which Lozinsky prefers to keep, rendering the phrase as "nasha neblagodatnaia Mariia," 11).

In general, Nabokov does well with puns. When Russian allows him a sonic roll, he may both maintain the pun or joke, and also pick up additional assonances and alliterations to compensate for those lost elsewhere. For example, the humor of the curé's "Je n'en ai cure, compagnons, et je jure qu'ils lèveront plutôt le siège de ma maison, que je ne lèverai le mien de ce fauteuil" rests on the pun "siege" and "seat": "bottom" or "ass," as well as "chair" (52). Here Nabokov outdoes Rolland: "Osada osadoi, a ia kak siadu, zasiadu i zada so stula ne sdvinu" (49). Miller's English translation can only offer ". . . they could raise this house from the ground easier than they could make me move out of this armchair" (60). Similarly, Nabokov enhances Colas' version of the trans-lingual comparison of a pregnant woman to an oven (as in: "she has another one in the oven"). Rolland: "A mon gendre! C'est son tour, Florimond, le pâtissier, qu'il veille sur son four!" (16); Nabokov: "Teper' tvoia ochered' ziat' moi pekar' Floridor; peki, opekai!" (13; "It's Florimond the baker, my son-in-law's turn to watch over her oven"). Miller drops the comparison altogether.

Particularly interesting for the student of translation are the instances where the replacement of a set of French sounds is dictated by an inescapable Russian word or grammatical structure. In *Colas Breugnon*, ". . . les Roches de Basserville pointent entre les fourrés, leurs dents de sangliers" (24; "The Rocks of Basserville stick out among the trees like boar tusks"). These rocks become "Basvil'skie skaly" (Nabokov) or "bassvil'skie skaly" (Lozinsky), and in both cases the repeated *s* and *k* sounds direct the further development of the sentence: Nabokov proposes "Basvil'skie skaly probivaiut kustarnik klykami svoimi kaban'imi" (21), another example of his predilection for instrumental

structures. Lozinsky offers "bassvil'skie skaly vysovyvaiut iz chashchi svoi kaban'i klyki" (18).

Most difficult of all to transpose are the songs, baby talk, incantations, charms, proverbs and sayings. The dedication of *Colas Breugnon* to St. Martin des Gaules, patron saint of Clamecy, and more particularly of its carpenters, provides a good example of the problems that can be posed even by a simple proverb: "St. Martin boit le bon vin / et laisse l'eau courre au molin" ("St. Martin drinks the good wine and lets the water run to the mill"). Here, Nabokov has to pad considerably for his rhyme: "Sviatoi Martyn i p'ian i syt vsegda. / Puskai pod mel'nitsei bezhit voda."

When Colas' granddaughter has been stricken by the plague, he joins an old woman in a syncretic spell for her recovery, which involves exhorting an aspen tree (*un tremble*, in French) to take the child's fever. For good measure, they threaten the tree with an axe if it does not cooperate: "Tremble, tremble mon mignon, / Prends mon frisson. / Je t'en prie et je t'en somme, / Par les personnes / De la Sainte-Trinité. / Mais si tu fais l'entêté, / Si tu ne veux m'écouter, / Garde à toi! te trancherai" (CB 147–148). ("Trepet, milaia osina, / Imenem Ottsa i Syna, / Imenem Sviatogo Dukha / Zaklinaiu ia tebia. / Esli–zh ty mol'bu moiu / Iz upriamstva ne poimesh', / Drozh moiu ne zaberesh', / Beregis'! Tebia srubliu" [NP 139]; "Shake, shake my sweet, / My shudders take. / Thus I ask and order thee / By the sacred Trinity. / But if you stubborn be / And you fail to heed me / Beware, for I shall axe thee"). The spell-casting ends with the two old people spitting three times into Colas' hat, which has been stuffed with straw, and repeating; "Crapauds, croupissants accroupis, que le croup vous étouffe!" (a variant on a passage in Rabelais, which is already a variant on a poem by Clément Marot. See *Gargantua*, chapter XIII). Nabokov renders this as "Da zadushit vas zhaba, gniiuchiia zhaby, podzhavshiia lapy!" (140), and Lozinsky as "zhaby bolotnye, zhirnye, plotnye, zhaba vas udavi!" (110). An approximate English version might be "Cursèd crouching toads, catch croup and choke!"

At the end of the chapter "La mort de la Vieille" ("The Death of My Old Lady"), Colas addresses his descendents, foreseeing how he will live on through them. This lyrical passage concludes with a characteristic series of agricultural images: "Au-delà de ma vie, au-delà de mon champ s'allongent les sillons, ils embrassent la terre, ils enjambent l'espace; comme une voie lactée, ils couvrent de leur réseau toute la voûte azurée. Vous êtes mon espérance, mon désir, et mon grain, qu'à travers l'infini je sème à pleines mains" (151; "Beyond my life, beyond my field, stretch the furrows; they embrace the earth, they bestride space, like a milky way, their network stretches over the whole azure vault. You are my hope, my desire, and my seed, which I sow in great handfuls throughout the infinite vastness").

The Burgundian artisan ends his sentence with his hands full of life. While being "faithful" to Rolland's text, each of his two great Russian translators bends this last sentence in a characteristic way; one emphasizes

time, the other, space. The Soviet Lozinsky has the sentence end with Colas' eye fixed on the future: "Vy—moi semena, kotorye ia kidaiu v griadushchie vremena" (112). Nabokov–Sirin closes with Colas' gaze turned towards the greater freedom of infinite space: "Vy—zhelan'e moe, upovan'e, i gorsti semian, kotorye shchedro ia razsypaiu v prostranstvakh bezdonnykh" (143).

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NOTES

1. Rolland, 1919, p. 11. All subsequent page references are to this edition and will be given in the text (CB). Page references to Nabokov's translation (NP), to Lozinsky's, and to Miller's English translation will also be given in the text.
2. Rolland, 1992, p. 28.
3. Rolland, "Primechaniia," 1956, p. 183. This postscript was written for the 1930 Soviet edition.
4. Rolland, ibid., pp. 184, 186.
5. English translations from the French are mine unless otherwise attributed.
6. Rolland, 1922 (trans. V. Sirin [Nabokov], p. 17). Nabokov uses the old style spelling, which has been modernized in the transliterations for this article.
7. Boyd, 1990, p. 176.
8. Ibid.
9. Probably an anagram of the name Jean Turquet.
10. Rabelais, p. 464.
11. Leighton, pp. 90–91.

NOTES ON PROSODY

The exchanges on versification in *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* illustrate certain fundamental aspects of Nabokov's thinking about the subject (77–79, 109, 248). He argues with great confidence as a practitioner who also feels himself to be rooted in a secure theoretical tradition, while Wilson is enmired in the details of stressing and terminology that have tended to marginalize metrics in the English-speaking world.

Besides the exchanges with Edmund Wilson, Nabokov dealt with the theory and practice of Russian versification in a number of his writings. The discussions with Wilson may be seen as a first version of Nabokov's most substantial single work on the subject, the *Notes on Prosody* appended to the commentary on *Eugene Onegin*.[1] Among the fictional works, pride of place is held by the remarks on verse made from the point of view of Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, the poet-hero of the novel *The Gift*. In chapter 11 of *Speak, Memory* Nabokov gives an account of the process of composition of his first poem, paying particular attention to the problem of rhythm.

In all these writings, Nabokov speaks explicitly as the pupil or even disciple of Andrei Bely (1880–1934).[2] In 1910, Bely published his collection of essays *Simvolizm* (*Symbolism*).[3] The book contains two pioneering studies of rhythmical variation in the Russian iambic tetrameter ("I4"). In the letters to Wilson (78), Nabokov mis-remembers the title of this book, calling it *Poetica*, which is, of course, the title of a famous series of Formalist texts which had nothing to do with Bely and indeed represents a tendency in poetics completely opposed to Bely's approach. In the *Notes on Prosody*, written in the early 1960s, Nabokov states that when still a boy, he was "greatly fascinated by Belïy's admirable work" (14) but that he had not consulted it since he last read it in 1918.[4] Nabokov takes Bely's work as his only authority in Russian metrics. In doing so, he bypasses the central tradition completely. As I have tried to show elsewhere,[5] Bely had a characteristically brilliant insight into the way verse rhythm differs from verse meter, a crucial distinction that does indeed underlie a good deal of the theory and practice of modern Russian metrics. But Bely's example and his direct influence were limited to this initiative. Bely went on from his quantitative basis to claim an aesthetic function and value for the various rhythmical patterns he descried in the very restricted sample of I4 that he subjected to analysis (a grand total of only 596 lines). The central academic tradition in Russian quantitative metrics has avoided evaluation; instead, the study of verse rhythm has concentrated on building up an objective and maximally broad-based body of statistical data about the way the rhythm of any given meter compares and contrasts in different phases of a poet's career, in the work of one poet as opposed to another, in the poetry of one period and another, and so on.

Nabokov painstakingly expounds the rhythm of a passage from Pushkin's *Graf Nulin* in his letter to Edmund Wilson of August 24, 1942, by means of a ladder-like diagram with solid circles to represent metrically strong syllables that are not occupied by a word-stress and hollow circles to represent those that are; the patterns made by connecting the solid circles are then described.[6] This method has found practically no other proponent apart from Nabokov since Bely used it in 1910. Instead, metrists sum the stresses on each of the ictuses (metrically strong syllables) and express the resulting totals as percentages of the total possible number in the appropriate position. The example from *Graf Nulin* written out and analyzed by Nabokov (p. 76) yields the following total numbers of stresses for the four ictuses: 13–11–9–17. To express such small numbers as percentages is obviously unsound, but for the sake of illustration we will do so; the result is: 76.5–64.7–52.9–100.0. The average stressing per ictus may be calculated by comparing the total number of stresses to the total number of ictuses, here (13+11+9+17) 50: (17x4) 68, which gives 73.5%. Nabokov's commentary in the margins of his diagram pays attention to the thematic elements articulated by the different rhythmical variations in this passage; apparently, he is not interested in its overall profile. Meanwhile, for metrists working in the central tradition the particular interest of this passage

stems from the fact that in it, the first ictus is stressed more heavily than the second, producing what is sometimes known as the "eighteenth-century" rhythmical profile.[7] This rhythm is not characteristic of the work as a whole or of Pushkin's I4 as a whole.

Nabokov does give raw quantitative data concerning his counts of the rhythm of *Eugene Onegin* in the table on p. 76 of *Notes on Prosody*. The greater accessibility of these data if they had been expressed as percentages may readily be appreciated; as it is, they give totals for the various rhythmical variations that cannot easily be comprehended *in toto*. If we rewrite Nabokov's data here in percentage terms, we may usefully compare the results with those generated by other metrists. Nabokov's count yields the following percentages for the four ictuses in the 5,523 lines of Pushkin's poem: 84.1–90.4–43.4–100.0, average 79.5. Taranovsky's count is 84.4–89.9–43.1–100.0, average 79.4;[8] that the discrepancies should be so tiny illustrates the objectivity of the statistical method. They may be explained by reference to the examples of his stressings given by Nabokov on p. 68 of *Notes*; in the first passage, where Nabokov counts four stresses in the line "Vot, kak ubil on vosem' let" the standard method, despite the general agreement to maximize stressing, would regard the first ictus (*kak*) as unstressed; and in the second example, where Nabokov counts three stresses in the line "A volochilsia kak-nibud'," the standard method would regard the first and third ictuses as unstressed.

Besides summing the number of stresses on each ictus and expressing the totals as a percentage of the total number of lines, verse rhythm may also be notated horizontally by listing the rhythmical variations according to a standard nomenclature.[9] In the letters to Wilson, Nabokov invents his own nomenclature for variations in I4: R^{o}, R^{1}, and so on. The example Nabokov created for Wilson would in standard notation be as follows: VI-I-III-I-IV-I-II-I. In *Notes on Prosody* (pp. 75–76) Nabokov abandoned the system he used in the letters to Wilson and instead used Roman numerals to label the rhythmical variations; his numbering unfortunately does not correspond to the standard set. We may once more express Nabokov's raw figures for *Eugene Onegin* as percentages and compare them with Taranovsky's, simultaneously illustrating the difference between Nabokov's Roman nomenclature and the standard set. Nabokov's system calls a line with four stresses "0" and then lists the other types according to the ictuses which are not fulfilled by a stress:

Nabokov	0	I	II	III	II+III	I+III
	27.4	6.8	9.2	47.1	0.4	9.1
Taranovsky	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
	26.8	6.6	9.7	47.5	0.4	9.0

Again, we see that the discrepancies are tiny.

The method of quantitative analysis described in outline above was developed independently of Andrei Bely's work by Boris Tomashevsky (1890–1957), whose studies of Pushkin's verse rhythm in the late 1920s are classics.[10] In these studies, Tomashevsky went beyond the level at which Nabokov and most other researchers stop and took into account the rhythmical variations produced by word boundary as well as word stress. Tomashevsky's method reached its apogee with Kiril Taranovsky's monumental volume on the theory and history of the Russian binary metres; the figures for *Eugene Onegin* from this book were cited above. Since that time there have been some important additions to the method; in particular, the students of the late Academician Kolmogorov, with M. L. Gasparov prominent among them, have used probability theory to quantify our understanding of the relationship between linguistic norms in verse and theoretical norms obtaining outside its constraints.[11]

Besides Bely's book of 1910, Nabokov made public acknowledgement of only two other works on Russian metrics. One is Boris Unbegaun's manual,[12] which, despite its illustrative value, was obsolete methodologically when it first appeared and was soon left even further behind when Soviet metrics began to revive after 1958. Unbegaun does not explain the Tomashevsky method for studying verse rhythm; his bibliography, however, refers amply to the work of Tomashevsky and his successors down to Taranovsky. This work was ignored by Nabokov. As the letters to Wilson suggest, Nabokov evidently saw his primary task as explaining to an ignorant anglophone public the principles of Bely's method of rhythmical analysis. Accordingly, in *Notes on Prosody* Nabokov developed an English vocabulary to express the concepts that were used by Bely in his work on verse rhythm. This vocabulary, for all its expressiveness and resourcefulness, with its "scuds," "tilts," and so on, has never attracted specialists in Russian versification. It occasionally makes an appearance in non-specialist discussions of verse rhythm, but it remains essentially a solipsism.

The scope of quantitative metrics in the U.S.S.R. soon went far beyond the limited study of rhythm in one metre that Bely produced and then abandoned for other concerns. Substantial quantitative study of Russian verse at the level of meter as opposed to that of rhythm began with the 1934 book on Pushkin's metrical repertoire by N.V. Lapshina, I.K. Romanovich, and B.I. Iarkho, the third work besides those of Bely and Unbegaun that is cited by Nabokov—without naming its authors (*Notes*, pp. 69–70). The study of metrical repertoire is now conducted according to procedures that were first systematically ventured in this book and have subsequently become standardized. The application of this standard procedure has produced a mass of information that can be used to assess the work of any individual Russian poet or period. Spearheaded again by M.L. Gasparov, its product is conveniently summarized in his two books on the history of Russian versification.[13]

Thus, notwithstanding the self-confidence he displays to Edmund Wilson, when Nabokov discusses Russian metrics he in fact talks a private language and employs an arcane methodology, and to a large extent goes over ground that others had already covered in a more systematic and comprehensive way. His aims differ radically from those of Russian academic metrists, who developed a method for the study of verse that has proved much more powerful, objective, central, and communicable than the procedure Nabokov takes it upon himself to propound. And Nabokov's comparative study of English and Russian verse (*Notes*, pp. 3–33) has been left far behind by the work of Bailey, Gasparov, Scherr, and Tarlinskaja.[14]

However, all this is not to say that Nabokov's views in *Notes on Prosody* on Russian versification are misleading or devoid of interest. Quite the contrary: his views are informed by an acute ear, his own refined taste in two languages, and great accuracy and consistency of observation. Nabokov's explanations of the way he divides Russian words for metrical purposes into the categories metrists call obligatorily stressed, optionally stressed, and unstressed have considerable practical interest (pp. 73–76). The outline history of the Russian iambic tetrameter before Pushkin (pp. 39–46) and the thumbnail characterizations of the properties of various Russian metres (pp. 76–82) are captivating. Nabokov's remarks on the aesthetic effects and thematic relevance of rhythmical variation in the individual passages he cites cannot fail to fascinate the attentive reader of Russian poetry. His outline of Russian rhyme (pp. 82–95) still retains its freshness. The point of the matter is that Nabokov, like other practitioners such as Maiakovsky and David Samoilov,[15] tends to be more interested in local and specific effects in versification, while academic metrists have been mainly interested in describing the situation in more abstract terms at much higher levels of generalization.

In his poetic practice, Nabokov did not accept the less strictly regulated measures that so changed the metrical repertoire of Russian verse during his time. Nor did he adopt any of the typographical experiments that changed the physical appearance of Russian poetry on the page. In rhyme, Nabokov only made intense use of the common innovations of his time for satirical purposes; in the vast bulk of his work, he adopted the least radical devices, remaining largely content with the pre-Symbolist conventions. In terms of stanza form, he uses AbAb quatrains with remarkable persistence and makes very little use of dactylic rhyme, homogeneous clausulae, and unrhymed forms. In all these respects, Nabokov's choices resembled those made by other émigré poets of the inter-war period, with the marked exception of Tsvetaeva. For them, as for all Russian poets, verse form was an ideologically semanticized area: formal innovation was characteristic of those poets who stood politically to the left, who accepted the Revolution of 1917, and remained in Russia or soon returned to it. For Nabokov, this rendered them unacceptable; and the formal choices that he made indicated very graphically his nostalgia for a time before the spirit of innovation had changed Russian poetry and Russian society. His theoret-

ical views were similar: he chose to ignore the work in versification that was one of the most genuine and lasting achievements of Soviet scholarship in the humanities, remaining faithful to the memories of his youth.[16]

G.S. Smith

NOTES

1. Volume III, pp. 448–540; also published separately as Vladimir Nabokov, *Notes on Prosody. From the Commentary to his Translation of Pushkin's Eugene Onegin*. New York: Pantheon, 1964 (Bollingen Series LXXIIA). Hereafter all page references to this reprint will be given in the text.
2. On the relations between Nabokov and Bely, see D. Barton Johnson, "Belyj and Nabokov." [Editor's note: see also the article "Nabokov and Bely" in this volume.]
3. Bely, 1910. See especially "Opyt kharakteristiki russkogo chetyrekhstopnogo iamba" (pp. 286–330) and "Sravnitel'naia morfologiia ritma russkikh lirikov v iambicheskom dimetre" (pp. 331–95).
4. According to Andrew Field (1977, p. 133), Nabokov said that "it was through Voloshin that he first became acquainted with the metrical theories of Andrei Bely" in 1919; according to Boyd (1990, pp. 150–51), which is in general a better-informed account, this occurred in 1918.
5. G.S. Smith, 1987, pp. 242–82; see also Gasparov, 1988. As Gasparov shows, Bely himself eventually rejected his own early work on rhythm, which he came to regard as static and inert, in favor of an approach that he believed to be more nearly adequate to the dynamism of the verse text and to the phenomenon of rhythm in general.
6. *NWL* 76–79. During his Crimean period Nabokov analyzed some of his own verse using this system: see Boyd, 1990, p. 151.
7. Taranovsky.
8. See Scherr, pp. 48–49.
9. Ibid., p. 45.
10. Tomashevsky.
11. See Gasparov, 1974, Introduction and pp. 79–88.
12. Unbegaun; see *Notes on Prosody*, p. 23.
13. Gasparov, 1974, 1984.
14. See Bailey; Scherr, pp. 2–10; Tarlinskaja, 1976 and 1987.
15. See Maiakovsky, Samoilov.
16. [Editor's note: see also the article on "Nabokov's Poetry" in this volume.]

"THE OTHERWORLD"

The term "otherworld" is an imperfect translation of the Russian word "potustoronnost'," a noun derived from an adjective denoting a quality or state

that pertains to the "other side" of the boundary separating life and death; other possible translations are "the hereafter" and "the beyond." The centrality of this concept for Nabokov's art was announced by his widow in her Foreword to the posthumous collection of his Russian poems published in 1979 (*Stikhi* 3).[1] In her brief but seminal remarks, Véra Nabokov calls "potustoronnost'" Nabokov's "main theme" and stresses that although it "saturates everything he wrote," it does not appear to have been noted by anyone. She then names several poems from various periods of his life and a passage from the novel *The Gift* that express this theme with varying degrees of clarity. But she does not go beyond her husband's own veiled hints in these works about what "potustoronnost'" meant for him: it is "a mystery that he carries in his soul and that he neither may nor can betray"; it is what "gave him his imperturbable love of life ['zhizneradostnost'] and lucidity even during life's most difficult trials." A fuller statement regarding Nabokov's otherworldly beliefs can be found in his lecture "The Art of Literature and Commonsense," which was published posthumously in 1980 and which is, among other remarkable things, a revealing expression of his *sui generis* faith in a transcendent realm (*LL* 371–80).[2]

This lecture and Véra Nabokov's Foreword proclaim views that fly in the face of trends that have dominated Nabokov criticism for some sixty years, according to which he is either celebrated or condemned for being a brilliant and ironic manipulator of fictional techniques. Given the vast number of publications about Nabokov that have appeared, especially during the past few decades, it may seem surprising how relatively few readers have attempted to engage these views or to consider their implications for the radical rereading of Nabokov's legacy that they suggest. Nevertheless, a number of investigators have explored the nature of Nabokov's "otherworldly" beliefs, especially in recent years.[3] It is not at all certain, however, that any of these studies has yet effected a major change in how Nabokov is generally viewed by serious students of literature around the world.

As far as I know, Véra Nabokov was the first to state that the central fact of both Nabokov's life and his art was something that could be characterized as an intuition about a transcendent realm of being (although occasional comments about aspects of Nabokov's metaphysical beliefs in some of his works appeared earlier as well). At the same time, the form and substance of her valuable revelation underscore the pitfalls involved in talking about it. Because Nabokov believed that his "mystery" was ultimately incommunicable (which would have been a less convincing claim were he not an acknowledged master of three languages) he used only circumlocutions to describe it. For example, when an interviewer asked if he believed in God, Nabokov's famous response was: "I know more than I can express in words, and the little I can express would not have been expressed, had I not known more" (*SO* 45). In "The Art of Literature and Commonsense" he speaks of an aspect of his faith in the following terms: "That human life is but the first installment of the serial soul and that one's individual secret is not lost in the process of earthly

dissolution, becomes something more than an optimistic conjecture, and even more than a matter of religious faith, when we remember that only commonsense rules immortality out" (*LL* 377). It follows that any attempt to discuss this mysterious knowledge in terms other than the veiled ones he used, or in abstraction from the works in which he embodied it, is bound to betray it, at least to some extent. The risk is unavoidable, however, if one wishes to grasp the essence of his art.

"Otherworld" might seem to imply beliefs that are primarily metaphysical. However, Nabokov's writings show that his metaphysics are inseparable from his ethics and his aesthetics; indeed, all three are best understood as names for a single continuum of beliefs, not for separate categories of Nabokov's interests.[4] Nevertheless, for analytical purposes, it is necessary to formulate distinctions and definitions. By "metaphysics" I mean Nabokov's faith in the apparent existence of a transcendent, nonmaterial, timeless and beneficent, ordering and ordered realm of being that seems to provide for personal immortality and that affects everything that exists in the mundane world. I say "apparent" and "seems to" because a cardinal tenet of Nabokov's faith is the irreducible alterity of this other realm from the vantage point of mortal experience: all one can have is intuitions of what it may be like; no certainty about it is possible. By "ethics" I mean Nabokov's belief in the existence of good and evil; his belief that both are absolutized by being inextricably linked to the transcendent otherworld; and that both are accessible to mankind and especially to true artists as universal criteria for guiding and judging man's behavior. Nabokov's "aesthetics" consist of two aspects: the first is the theme of the creation of art, which, as has long been noted by critics, Nabokov embodies in his fictions in a variety of forms; the second is the characteristic shape and style of his works—the structures, devices, syntax, alliteration, narrative perspectives, and rhythms that are his signatures. The relationship among metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics in Nabokov's works is so intimate that it might be visualized graphically as a ternary field with one of the terms labeling each of the apexes and his works represented by points within the field. Thus, any work, or any aspect of a work, needs to be located in terms of metaphysical, ethical, and aesthetic criteria, and, conversely, any single criterion can be read in terms of the other two. By making this claim I do not mean to suggest that Nabokov is a grim figure concerned exclusively with deep and weighty issues. I join many of his admirers in seeing him as a comic genius; but he is also much more than that because his conception of the otherworld underlies the comedy. Nabokov's description of Gogol's mature style is an apt characterization of his own later writing, especially in such works as *Pale Fire*, *Ada*, and *Look at the Harlequins!*: "It gives one the sensation of something ludicrous and at the same time stellar, lurking constantly around the corner—and one likes to recall that the difference between the comic side of things, and their cosmic side, depends on one sibilant" (*NG* 141). Those who consider Nabokov merely

a brilliant but shallow stylist and gamesman are simply unaware of the hidden depths in his works.

The thematic and formal unity of Nabokov's art can be illustrated by considering his intuition about the separation of the otherworld from mortal life: it necessitates an ironic (but decidedly not a nihilistic) attitude toward the possibility that man can know anything definite about the "other" realm. One of the ways Nabokov's conclusion pertaining to metaphysics merges into his aesthetic practice is through the multifarious forms of ambiguity and ironic undercutting that fill his works. For example, the reader who is persuaded by Fyodor's conclusion in *The Gift* that the fatidic patterning in his life is evidence of a beneficent otherworld is confronted near the novel's end with the fact that Fyodor is also the author of the work in which he appears, and thus may be responsible for creating the patterning he discovers. On the other hand, there is highly esoteric patterning in the text that seems to be beyond his ken. In this light, the reflexive structure of *The Gift* clearly has not only aesthetic but also metaphysical significance; or, in other words, the novel's form is a perfect mirror for its content.

The only way out of the charmed circles of Nabokov's fictions is to recognize the virtual identity of the characters' otherworldly intuitions with those in Nabokov's non-fictional writings, where they are not similarly undermined. Within a given novel or story, mutually exclusive readings frequently remain suspended, although usually not equally balanced, and, in any event, do not simply cancel each other. The net effect is a suggestive uncertainty, or irony about the role of the otherworld in human affairs. To put Nabokov's characteristic narrative tactic into proper perspective, however, it is necessary to realize that irony and faith need not be incompatible. Indeed, this blend was fundamental for the German Romantics, especially Friedrich Schlegel, and was widespread among the French Symbolists, including Baudelaire and Mallarmé, and Symbolist and Acmeist poets in Russia—Aleksandr Blok, Andrei Bely, Nikolai Gumilev—who were active at the time Nabokov was being formed as a writer (*NWL* 220).

Another link between Nabokov's metaphysics and aesthetics hinges on his seminal epiphanic experiences, which he describes at length in his memoir *Speak, Memory* and in "The Art of Literature and Commonsense." He also grants the experience to his favorite positive characters from novels spanning at least three decades, such as Cincinnatus in *Invitation to a Beheading*, Fyodor in *The Gift*, Krug in *Bend Sinister*, Pnin in the eponymous novel, and Shade in *Pale Fire*. The characteristic features of Nabokov's epiphanies are a sudden fusion of varied sensory data and memories, a feeling of timelessness, and intuitions of immortality. This perceptual, psychological, and spiritual experience is intimately connected with Nabokov's conception of artistic inspiration and is thus a facet of his theme of the creation of art. But the experience is also structurally congruent with a characteristic *formal* feature of his narratives, in which details that are in fact connected are hidden within

contexts that conceal the true relations among them. This narrative tactic puts the burden on the reader to either accumulate the components of a given series or to discover the one detail that acts as the "key" for it; when this is achieved, the significance of the entire preceding concealed chain or network is retroactively illuminated. This process of decipherment that Nabokov imposes on his readers has far-reaching implications. Since the conclusion that the reader makes depends on his retaining details in his memory, he appears to have an atemporal insight into some aspect of the text's meaning; he is thus lifted out of the localized, linear, and temporally bound reading process in a manner resembling how characters' epiphanies remove them from the quotidian flow of events within the world of the text.[5] The implication of this phenomenon is that the structure of Nabokov's texts is related to the structure of cognitive moments in life, at least as he conceived them.

The way ethics merge into Nabokov's thematic and formal continuum is illustrated well by *Invitation to a Beheading*. Cincinnatus, the novel's protagonist, is morally superior to his jailers because of his visual acuity and perspicacity: for him the material world they inhabit and enjoy is a sham, and he understands or intuits things for which they do not even have concepts. Nabokov embodies this theme in the novel's form by intentionally including flaws in the narrative that *mimic* sloppy writing by a forgetful or careless author (there are additional facets to this device as well). This puts the reader into a position with regard to the novel's text that is exactly the same as Cincinnatus' with regard to the flawed material world within the novel. Thus, via the form of the narrative itself the reader becomes involved in what is, in the novel's own terms, an ethical enterprise—to differentiate between truth and falsehood together with Cincinnatus. A necessary caveat regarding the transferability of interpretive strategies from life to art is that Nabokov clearly was not advocating a confusion of life with art. Pifer makes the essential point that the kind of artistic control Nabokov manifested in his works is punished when a character attempts to transfer it to life, as in the case of Axel Rex in *Laughter in the Dark*, Hermann in *Despair*, and Humbert in *Lolita*.[6] In this special sense as well, however, ethics remain attached to aesthetics because all three characters fall distinctly short of being true Nabokovian artists. Finally, because *Invitation to a Beheading* is underlain by a quasi-Gnostic, dualistic world view, Cincinnatus' and the reader's confronting flawed worlds on their respective textual levels also acquires metaphysical significance and thereby adds metaphysics to the continuum between ethics and aesthetics.

I am of course aware of the irony inherent in claiming that a core of unvarying beliefs underlies Nabokov's variegated fictions, especially because he consistently celebrated unique details and condemned generalizations that obscured or ignored them. However, my claim about what the otherworld means in his art is not intended to belittle or deemphasize the atomistic details out of which he built his works (and which he captures with unequalled mastery) but rather to outline the laws that show how they are put together.

Nabokov's own reading of other authors is predicated on these principles. As he illustrates in his book on Gogol, for example, his focus on the distinctive stylistic details in "The Overcoat" leads him beyond mere formal considerations to the conclusion that the story contains "shadows linking our state of existence to those other states and modes which we dimly apprehend in our rare moments of irrational perception" (*NG* 145).

Vladimir E. Alexandrov

NOTES

1. An English translation of her remarks appears in Dmitri Nabokov's "Translating with Nabokov," pp. 174–75. See also Dmitri Nabokov's brief discussion of his father's beliefs as manifested in *The Gift*, *Pale Fire*, and other works in "Nabokov and the Theatre," pp. 16–18.
2. Noteworthy poetic expressions of Nabokov's beliefs can also be found in "Vliublennost'" ("Being in Love"), *LATH* 25–26 (where "potustoronnost'" is translated as "the hereafter"), rpt. *Stikhi* 317–18; and in "Slava" ("Fame"), *PP* 102–113, especially pp. 110–11.
3. The recent studies that concern themselves with Nabokov's otherworldly beliefs are Alexandrov, *Nabokov's Otherworld*; Boyd, *Nabokov: The Russian Years* and *Nabokov: The American Years*. Important earlier studies include Boyd, 1981 (subsequently incorporated into his *Nabokov's Ada*, q.v.); De Jonge; D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 1–4, 185–223; Pifer, 1989; Setschkareff; Sisson, 1979; and Toker, 1989, pp. 1–20. Quite a few other critics include isolated passing remarks about Nabokov's otherworldly beliefs, while several focus on these specifically in individual works: e.g., Davydov, *Teksty Matreshki*, pp. 100–82; Davydov, "Dostoevsky and Nabokov," p. 169; Field, *VN*, pp. 30–31; L. Foster, "Nabokov's Gnostic Turpitude," p. 119; Fowler, p. 102; Karlinsky, "Vladimir Nabokov," p. 162; McCarthy, 1962, pp. 78–79, 82; Moynahan, *Vladimir Nabokov*, pp. 11, 14; Schaeffer, 1973; Stuart, pp. 178–80; Tammi, 1985, pp. 22–25; Varshavsky, pp. 215, 233; E. White, pp. 22–25.
4. For more on this, see Alexandrov, 1991.
5. See Sisson, 1979, pp. 25–39, and intermittently throughout his brilliant dissertation, for another discussion of Nabokov's epiphanies and their function in his works.
6. Pifer, 1980, pp. 159–65.

PALE FIRE

Termed "one of the most complex novels ever written"[1] by awed critics, *Pale Fire* (1962) is also the most thoroughly explicated of all Nabokov works. In the three decades of its existence, the novel has engendered a full-fledged critical

heritage: reviews, annotations, essays, chapters in books, and one book-length monograph (Meyer, 1988). Not counting reviews, there are more than eighty studies of *Pale Fire*. Evidently, it will not be possible to name all that work here, some of it very ingenious. But a sampling of representative studies will be surveyed in conjunction with particular analytic problems. (The pioneering essays on *Pale Fire* were by McCarthy, 1982 [orig. 1962]; C. Williams, 1963. Helpful studies include: Berberova, "The Mechanics"; Alter, 1975; Walker, 1976; A. Wright; D. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression,* pp. 60–73. There are others, but these should aid the first-time reader to find her bearings.)

As the most immediate problems that any reader of *Pale Fire* encounters concern narrative structure, the present article will concentrate on structural matters. This means that many fascinating questions must be ignored, among these the large topic of the novel's roots in Nabokov's Russian writing, or its puzzling "metaphysics."[2] The concluding remarks seek to provide a plausible motivation for the narrative complexities and to point out some thematic continuities in other works by Nabokov.

The first critics' awe is understandable, as is the urge to explicate that followed. For *Pale Fire* is itself designed as a critical commentary to end all commentaries.[3] In his own scholarly work Nabokov warned us that "the pursuit of reminiscences may become a form of insanity on the scholiast's part."[4] In *Pale Fire* he embodied this notion in the figure of Kinbote whose contention that "it is the commentator who has the last word" (*PF* 29),[5] is rendered more than problematic in the course of the narrative.

There is a ready model, then, for the unconventional facade of *Pale Fire*: the 999-line poem (pp. 31–69); its line-by-line commentary (pp. 71–301); plus a Foreword (pp. 11–29) and an Index (pp. 303–315). This is the scheme of a scholarly edition adopted by Nabokov in his four-volume *Eugene Onegin* (1964), finished before the novel.[6] The humorous disproportion of the text and its commentary—in either work—was aptly described by the author in a 1955 essay on translating Pushkin. He demanded "copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page so as to leave only the gleam of one textual line between commentary and eternity."[7]

But *Pale Fire* is still a novel, and its narrative structure cuts across all such outward divisions. This structure, cunningly concealed inside the frame of a critical apparatus, is based on the device of narrative embedding and its distinctively Nabokovian handling: construction of internal links between the embedded levels of fiction, which reverse the standard narrative hierarchy. What is rendered problematic is precisely the relationship between the embedded text and the outside frame or between the framing reality and the fictions that it contains.[8]

If one wants to visualize the novelistic world of *Pale Fire*, the familiar figure of "Chinese boxes" cannot be avoided.[9] As the order of these boxes is a

central problem to be solved in reading *Pale Fire*, their contents must first be inspected.

Kinbote

It is Charles Kinbote's editorial discourse that supplies the reader's first access to the novel. As an editor, he resides in a "wretched motor lodge" (*PF* 28) in the backwoods of a western state ("Cedarn, Utana" [29]), where he edits Shade's poem, composes the huge commentary, and—as he admits in the Index (314–15)—writes many of the variants to the poem.

But, aside from some more or less haphazard references (the "loud amusement park" [13, 235] outside his lodgings), the main bulk of the narrative is taken up by the embedded tale of Kinbote's life at New Wye (apparently upstate New York) as John Shade's neighbor. This is the story—in Kinbote's own definition—of "the glorious friendship" (101) between the poet and his future commentator. During the five months that the two lived as neighbors, they are said to have shared many an "inspiring evening stroll" (74, 80–81, 185–86), while Kinbote divulged to the poet the tale (a second-level embedded story) of his European past. For, as Kinbote leads us to believe, he is not Shade's countryman but a refugee from the little-known kingdom of "Zembla." According to Kinbote, the true source of Shade's posthumous "Pale Fire" is in the Zemblan materials that he provided for the poet, and the commentary is designed to prove this causal link. Without it, the editor claims, "Shade's text simply has no human reality at all . . . a reality that only [the] notes can provide" (28–29).

Zembla

The legend of Zembla comes to us via the tales recounted by Kinbote to Shade in the spring and summer of 1959. Kinbote is not just any Zemblan. In fact, he is the deposed king of that distant country. As the Index puts it quite plainly: Charles Kinbote = "Charles II" (306) in an academic disguise. Disguises are needed because the totalitarian party of Extremists, who now run Zembla, have sent an assassin in the king's wake. The assassin is named Jakob Gradus (first mentioned on p. 77). As chance would have it, the king is now employed as a lecturer in the same college where Shade teaches.

If all this sounds a bit implausible—to the reader as well as to the characters inside the tale—Kinbote trusts the narrative materials will be authenticated through the medium of Shade's verse. As he reports having told the poet, who registered scepticism more than once: "My dear John . . . do not worry about trifles. Once transmuted by you into poetry, the [Zemblan] stuff *will* be true, and the people *will* come alive" (214).

Shade

It is from Kinbote again that the reader learns about John Shade's real life. On this level, Shade teaches at Wordsmith College, composes his poem (begun on July 2, 1959 [74]), hears the yarns about Zembla from his neighbor, and (on July 21 [273]) dies from an assassin's bullet on Kinbote's doorstep. Kinbote, who has his own theory about the gunman (he says it was Gradus), appropriates the manuscript of the poem and flees to Utana to prepare his annotated edition. In terms of narrative embedding, therefore, Shade is but a character in a tale transmitted by Kinbote. But Shade's is the voice that transmits to us the poem.

Pale Fire

This is the title of the 999-line text that Shade writes during the last twenty days of his life. An autobiographical work, "Pale Fire" draws its materials from the poet's personal past: his childhood experiences, his forty-year marriage, the suicide of his daughter Hazel, his ruminations on death and the possibility of a hereafter. There seem to be elements in the poem that are fictional even from Shade's viewpoint (at least some of the names in it are fabrications [18, 195, 223, 256, 290]). But—as Kinbote finds to his chagrin—there is hardly a sign of Zembla in these lines. Kinbote sees here the influence of the poet's wife Sybil, "a domestic censor" (81). And it is to restore "the magnificent Zemblan theme" (91), excised by Sybil Shade, that he sets about his editorial work.

In addition, there are shorter texts by Shade embedded in the commentary (see pp. 93, 94–95, 115, 192–93, 216, 258, 284). And there are texts within texts within texts embedded inside "Pale Fire": the newspaper clippings quoted on ll. 97–98; "Jim Coates's" article (ll. 747–58); the TV shows viewed by the Shades on the night of Hazel's suicide (ll. 404–74).

Botkin/Zembla

But this is not all. It is further indicated that both the inner and the outer realities in the novel may be false ones. The suggestion occurs more than once that the assumed identity of the editor himself might be an alias of one "*Botkin,* V., American scholar of Russian descent" (Index [306]). "Prof. Botkin" reportedly teaches Russian at Wordsmith (155). Kinbote is supposedly teaching Zemblan (248). And it is rather broadly hinted that Kinbote's name may be "a kind of anagram of Botkin" (246). There is much play with Russian morphemes in the Zemblan language.[10] And Botkin, very aptly, is also a near anagram of *nikto* (Russian for "nobody").[11]

As to Zembla, if Kinbote turns out to be Russian, the status of this distant kingdom becomes somewhat doubtful. Few readers of *Pale Fire* will fail to suspect Kinbote/Botkin's pretensions to royalty. But does Zembla exist at all?[12] On the same day that Shade is shot in New Wye, *The New York Times* is said

to have carried an item on the Zemblan revolution (274). A related headline from a French paper is quoted in the text: "L'EX-ROI DE ZEMBLA EST-IL À PARIS?" (149). An encyclopedia in the Wordsmith college library shows a photograph of the Zemblan monarch (268), and Kinbote's resemblance to the deposed king is discussed at the faculty club (265–69).

Then again, is "Wordsmith" any more real than Zembla, or "Utana" or "New Wye"? The Chinese-box worlds of *Pale Fire* constantly cancel out each other. It may well be on the ultimate *indeterminacy* of such questions that much of the joy of reading this novel hinges—as was once quite persuasively pointed out by Véra Nabokov. In a letter to a publisher who had demanded that the narrative situation be made more univocal, she wrote: "Nobody knows, nobody should know—even Kinbote hardly knows—if Zembla really exists."[13]

When fictional characters in a novel go on producing new fictions, it becomes difficult for the reader to decide which of the embedding levels should be chosen as the primary one. Or, phrased in other terms, it may be difficult for us to choose the primary "author" of the embedded fictions.

This problem has been debated by critics with notable zest during the past three decades. Many of the enigmas buried in the narrative plot were already exposed in the well-known essay by Mary McCarthy printed on both sides of the Atlantic almost instantly after the novel.[14] It is due to her analytic eye that the present-day reader knows in advance to suspect Kinbote's story. We know better than to take in earnest his royal background. We know who "really" shot Shade (more on this in a moment). And we are ready at least to entertain the possibility of the Russian Botkin behind Kinbote's Zemblan persona.

These points have been developed further (sometimes very much so) by subsequent critics. As regards the questions of authorship, three principal positions have been advanced.

The hypothesis that the insane Kinbote is the author of the commentary *and* the poem was first put forth by Page Stegner. He wrote: "It is . . . possible, perhaps probable, that Gradus and Shade are as much figments of Kinbote's imagination as Charles the Beloved and the far-distant land of Zembla. . . . If he is able to dream up an Arabian Nights tale of his royal life . . . he is certainly able to dream up John and Sybil Shade . . . and create a fictitious poem as well."[15] Few critics have gone along with this reasoning as such (though Kinbote's insanity is hardly in doubt). A more sophisticated version was later proposed by D. Barton Johnson, who asserted that not Kinbote but his anagrammatic alter ego Botkin has authored the embedded texts in the novel. Botkin is a narrative agent who is himself "writing a novel about the entirely fictional characters Kinbote, Shade and Gradus."[16] But while this is ingenious, such readings tend to be reductive. Evidently someone (most probably the "old, happy, healthy, heterosexual Russian, a writer in exile" [300–301], evoked by Kinbote) has written the novel. Nonetheless, we are left with the tangled relationships between the narrative voices inside this construction.

Another line of argument, resulting in a similarly reductive reading, is chosen by all those critics who claim—following Andrew Field—that Shade is the author of the poem and the commentary. In Field's view, it is Shade who has invented Kinbote, whereas "V. Botkin . . . is the secondary Nabokovian agent who was the real person out of whom Shade fashioned Kinbote."[17] As a proof, Field offers the fact (if it is one) that "a sane man [= Shade] may invent an insane character," while the reverse is not possible.[18] His proposal has been taken up by many, either at face value,[19] or in more or less far-fetched variants, as in the view that "Kinbote is Shade's mad ghost, attempting in his commentary to carry on the unfinished task and write the last line of Shade's poem."[20]

According to the third alternative, *both* of the above solutions are valid to a degree, but the novel retains a basic ambiguity between them. There are indices in the text suggesting that Kinbote may indeed have invented Shade (and much else besides). And there are intriguing hints of Shade's having invented Kinbote. As the narrative keeps oscillating between these alternatives, the result is a vertiginous infinite regress. Or, in Mary McCarthy's often-quoted phrasing: "Each plane or level in its shadow box proves to be a false bottom; there is an infinite perspective regression, for the book is a book of mirrors."[21] Such unchecked ambiguity would be a distinctively "postmodernist" trait, and this is how *Pale Fire* has been classed in more than one typology of contemporary fiction.[22]

Each of these readings has its merits (especially the third), and it seems hardly timely to start resolving the debate here.[23] For the purposes of the present discussion it is sufficient to adopt a somewhat more straightforward view formulated by Robert Alter in what may be the most lucid analysis so far published of the novel: "Exegetes of [*Pale Fire*] . . . have tended to complicate it in gratuitous ways by publishing elaborate diagrams of its structure. . . . This is not a Jamesian experiment in reliability of narrative point-of-view, and there is no reason to doubt the existence of the basic fictional data—the Poem and its author, on the one hand, and the mad Commentary and its perpetrator on the other, inverted left hand."[24] In other words, the reader of *Pale Fire* may do better than promote unprovable theses about "authorship" in the novel. The more rewarding question to ask is not whether Kinbote has invented Shade or Shade Kinbote—or even the postmodern query whether both are inventing each other. Rather, we should look more closely into the characteristically Nabokovian problem of hidden *links* between the diverse parts of the text and consider their possible origin.

Before this question is taken up, let us look into the novel's title. The title encapsulates the narrative problem that has been treated here.

The literary source of the title (chosen by Shade, ll. 961–62) is well known, and these lines from *Timon of Athens* (IV, 3) have often been quoted in criticism:[25] ". . . I'll example you with thievery: / The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction / Robs the vast sea. The moon's an arrant thief, / And her pale fire she snatches from the sun, / The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves

/ The moon into salt tears. . . ." Though the pale fire trope also occurs in *Hamlet*[26] and—interestingly—in *The Life of Johnson*,[27] the primary source still seems to be *Timon*. The notion of a stolen reflection, a reflection stealing its light from some brighter sphere, serves as a metadescription of the themes occurring on each principal plane of the novel. These themes will be briefly surveyed.

Why does Shade name his poem "Pale Fire"? Not only because of "the fashionable device of entitling . . . a long poem . . . with a phrase lifted from a more or less celebrated poetical work of the past" (240), for the title proves apposite to the embedded text as such.[28] The notion of a fatally reflected "false azure" figures in the first lines of the poem (ll. 1–4). And the reflection trope recurs in Shade's meditations on the nameless gods controlling human existence: "It did not matter who they were . . . / No furtive light came from their involute / Abode . . ." (ll. 816–18). Thematic motivation behind this trope is enunciated in the third canto: there exists a higher transcendental order beyond the plane of everyday reality, reflected in the network of "accidents and possibilities" (l. 829) limning individual lives (see ll. 803–29). This credo underlies Shade's effort to write the story of his own life in a poetic form.

In Kinbote's editorial discourse the reflection trope is put to diverse uses. Kinbote even claims to have a Zemblan version of the play ("*Timon Afinsken*" [79–80]) with him. At the same time, the trope is used by the editor to suggest that Shade's text does after all borrow its inspiration from Zembla. What Kinbote proposes to do is to sort out all "echoes and wavelets of fire, and pale phosphorescent hints" (297) in the poem that he thinks derive from his tale.[29] He also acknowledges, in a somber moment, that "in its pale and diaphanous final phase [the poem] cannot be regarded as a direct echo of [his] narrative" (81), and evokes "the pale fire of the incinerator" (15) in Shade's backyard, where he believes the poet burned the variants containing the Zembla material. From the viewpoint of the editor, then, the title is motivated precisely in indicating the derivative status of Shade's creation in relation to that of his critic.

From the global perspective of *Pale Fire*, finally, the title acquires connotations that are beyond the ken of its narrative agents. Most obviously, Kinbote's claims turn out to be in vain. It is he who has "stolen" the dead poet's work. And it is evident that in composing his commentary he derives many things from Shade. He himself admits to "borrowing a kind of opalescent light from [the] poet's fiery orb" (81). Here *Pale Fire* functions as a not overly subtle satire of "academic" literary criticism. But Kinbote is no ordinary critic, and he does more than just imitate his subject. In order to determine his narrative function the question of links between the embedded fictions must now be examined in some detail.

Pale Fire develops (to a degree that is close to auto-parodic) Nabokov's life-long concern with "thematic designs" (*SM* 27) or patterns of coincidence hidden in the texture of life. For this novel is so constructed that *every* fictive level coincides with or borrows something from the others. It will be useful to distinguish here between instances where: (1) verbal motifs from the plane of Kinbote's (or Botkin's) real life are transferred into the embedded legend of Zembla; (2) motifs from Zembla coincide with those occurring in Shade's poem; (3) motifs from the embedded poem materialize, mysteriously as it were, on the plane of Shade's and Kinbote's shared reality.[30]

Taken together, such systematic reiterations may recall what Nabokov once wrote of Pushkin's novel in verse: "There is a conspiracy of words signaling to one another, throughout the novel, from one part to another"[31]—still one apt metadescription (compare Shade's "great conspiracy" [l. 171]) of the novel at hand as well.

Kinbote and Zembla

The Zemblan tale was composed during Kinbote's rambles with Shade at New Wye (though the composition may go on: compare the mention in the Index of a "rosy-cheeked goose boy . . . only now distinctly recalled by the writer" [307]).[32] This real-life setting turns up under various Zemblan guises.

Take, for example, Kinbote's closet homosexuality (23, 24–25, 26–27, 93, 98, 228), transformed into the "manly Zemblan customs" (208) of King Charles and his compatriots. In fact, the entire legend of Zembla might be explained away as a reflection of the editor's paranoia and his fears of exposure in the academic community (this was the 1950s).[33] When Kinbote refers to his "secret" (24–25, 214–15) he intends this to suggest his royal ancestry, but to Shade and others it can only imply his hidden inversion. (Shade: "I think I guessed your secret quite some time ago" [288].)

In an analogous manner, Kinbote's grudges against colleagues at Wordsmith College are projected into his tale.[34] The "professed Shadeans" (14), in the sense of those at the college who dare question Kinbote's credentials as a Shade scholar, reoccur as the Zemblan "group of especially devout Extremists calling themselves the Shadows" (150). Their leader, dubbed "Izumrudov" (255), turns out to resemble Kinbote's worst foe at the campus: "a young instructo . . . whom I shall mercifully call Gerald Emerald" (24). "Emerald" translates into the Russian "izumrud,"[35] and "Gerald" renders, via the transposal of "g" and "h" in transliteration, "Herald's Hall" (p. 120),[36] where the king is imprisoned. "Hal" (128), one of King Charles's Extremist guards, may derive his name from the note put into Kinbote's pocket by Emerald: "You have hal . . . s [hal*itosis*] real bad, chum" (98). And Kinbote's refusal to lecture on "The Hally Vally" (25) is also reflected in Zembla. According to Kinbote, the garbled title confuses "Odin's Hall with . . . a Finnish epic" (25)—*Kalevala*, apparently—and other onomastic variants

include "Odevalla" (138), a Zemblan town, as well as the name of the king's supporter: "Odon" (120).

Kinbote's stay at Judge Goldsworth's house engenders chunks of Zemblan lore. He likes to talk of "the Goldsworthian château" (19, 20, 97, 183, 216), and it is possible that the escape-through-the-tunnel episode in King Charles's castle (124–134, 295) may have been prompted by the clothes closet in the house. The name of the judge's youngest daughter—Alphina (84)—echoes that of the king's father, "Alfin the Vague" (101). Even the span of Alfin's life (1873–1918 [101]) equals the combined age of the four Goldsworth daughters (9 + 10 + 12 + 14 = 45 years [84]).

It is more than possible that the clue to the real-life identity of the Zemblan assassin Gradus lies buried in the Goldsworth household.[37] Inspecting his landlord's library, Kinbote comes across an album displaying pictures of criminals convicted by the judge: ". . . unforgettable faces of imbecile hoodlums . . . the close-set merciless eyes of a homicidal maniac (somewhat resembling, I admit, the late Jacques d'Argus)" (84). Shade resembled Judge Goldsworth, as the reader is informed in a roundabout manner (267). Which all ties together with the "snake-sad, close-set eyes" (294) of Shade's real-life killer. According to newspaper reports of the incident the gunman was no other than "Jack Grey," sent to the Institute for the Criminally Insane by the judge. He had escaped for the express purpose of avenging his conviction (for bits and pieces of this version, see pp. 284, 295, 299). Shade's death was but an outcome of these chance resemblances. Kinbote understandably balks at this explanation. According to him, such stories are "crass banalities circulated by the scurrilous and the heartless—by all those for whom romance, remoteness, sealskin-lined scarlet skies, the darkening dunes of a fabulous kingdom, simply do not exist" (85).

Zembla and Pale Fire

Zembla may derive from Kinbote's real life. But what he is concerned with is the dependence of Shade's "Pale Fire" on the legend of this fabulous kingdom. This, he says, is the "underside of the weave" (81) in the poem: the hidden network of verbal links knitting together the two fictions.

A telling instance is seen in the joint gloss to Shade's "And then the gradual and dual blue" (l. 17); "All colors made me happy: even gray" (l. 29). Kinbote writes: "By an extraordinary coincidence . . . our poet seems to name here (gradual, gray) a man, whom he was to see for one fatal moment three weeks later, but of whose existence at the time . . . he could not have known" (77). From here on, the reader will be on the lookout for even the faintest occurrences of "Gradus" in the verbal texture of the poem.[38] Such instances range from the recurrent "gradual" (also on l. 209) or "gray" (ll. 29, 475, 604, 937) to Shade's mention of "snubbing . . . the big G" (l. 549)—which *he* intends to denote the orthographic convention of capitalizing "God." Shade

also writes of being "whipped by the bough, / tripped by the stump" (l. 128–29); this receives an oddly prophetic sense from Kinbote's announcement that "tree" in Zemblan is "*grados*" (93). Elsewhere, the killer's alias as "Jack Degree" (from "de Grey" [77]) is again reflected in the poem when Shade puns on "shade"/"degree" (l. 728). Compare also the mock-scholarly note on the pairing of "Tana*gra*" and "*dus*t" (or "Lenin*grad us*ed to be Petrograd" [231]), well illustrating Kinbote's desperate urge to see significance in everything.

One foregrounded element in the texture of the poem has to do with jewel imagery. Shade concretizes the paradoxes of afterlife with a metaphoric reference to ". . . earrings from the other's jewel case" (l. 587); mentions "bits of colored light / . . . offering gems" (ll. 612–14); or singles out "An empty emerald case, squat and frog-eyed / Hugging the trunk" (ll. 238–39), referring to the green nymphal case of a hatched insect. On the plane of Zembla, this links up with the saga of the crown jewels (continued in the Index) as well as with the series of *izumrud*/Emerald links threaded throughout the commentary. Here a motif nominally originating in Kinbote's reality (Gerald Emerald) is transferred via Zembla (Izumrudov) to Shade's poem.

Another series of recurrences is based on numerical motifs. There is much ado about the 999 lines of Shade's poem.[39] And there is a series of emblematic "eights": "The boy was picked up at a quarter past / Eight" (ll. 389–90); "A quartet of bores, / . . . would debate / The Cause of Poetry on Channel 8" (ll. 410–12); "The miracle of a lemniscate left / Upon wet sand by nonchalantly deft / Bicycle tires . . ." (ll. 137–39); "[The] slender rubber band / which always forms, when dropped, an ampersand" (ll. 533–34).[40] This receives a Zemblan motivation when Kinbote tells of the actress "Iris Acht" (122) who died in 1888, had a secret liaison with the king's grandfather "in the mid-Eighties" (314), and arranged the meetings in a tunnel that measured, exactly, "1,888 yards" (127).

Lastly, Shade's poem opens with a reference to glass surfaces and deceptive mirrors. The bird in the first lines is slain because of "the false azure in the windowpane" (l. 2). Windows and mirrors figure prominently in Zembla as well. The Extremist revolution begins in the Glass Factory (120), and Gradus shows a marked predilection for glass (77, 150, 251). King Charles's palace has stained-glass windows (121, 296, 312), which recalls Shade: ". . . a glint of stained / Windows" (ll. 752–53). There is also the "mirror maker of genius" (314), identified as "Sudarg of Bokay" (111)—Jakob Gradus again in palindromic disguise. At one stage of his escape the king sees himself as a "scarlet reflection" (143) on the surface of a pool; Fleur de Fyler sees herself multiplied in the king's dressing-room mirror (111–12); and Hazel Shade sees herself dressed in her mother's furs: "[They] made / Her almost fetching; and the mirrors smiled" (ll. 360–61).

As to *azure*, the motif is recapitulated by Shade when he tells that prior to her suicide Hazel stopped before "the azure entrance" (l. 337) of a glass-framed restaurant. Kinbote appropriates the motif for the Zembla narrative:

on his way to the confrontation in New Wye Gradus first landed at "the Côte d'Azur airport" (250); he takes up residence in "Hotel Lazuli" (250).

Pale Fire and Shade

The third major series of inter-level links in the novel is constructed between Shade's real life and his embedded poem. It is natural that, like Kinbote, Shade draws freely on the New Wye reality in his autobiographical text. But a reverse tendency can also be observed: the last moments of Shade's life appear to emulate incidents *first* recorded in his poem. An eerie impression is thus created that the poetic text not only prefigures but may even exert control over events in the life of its maker.[41]

In Canto One, Shade describes how in his childhood he was once struck by a fit of fainting while occupied with a mechanical toy: "When I'd just turned eleven, as I lay / Prone on the floor and watched a clockwork toy—/ A tin wheelbarrow pushed by a tin boy—/ Bypass chair legs and stray beneath the bed, / There was a sudden sunburst in my head" (ll. 142–46). Assuming the pose of a prudent biographer, Kinbote ferrets out the real-life source of this image. A simple transference of a motif from the poet's life into his art is suggested: "By a stroke of luck I have seen it! . . . The boy was a little Negro of painted tin with a keyhole in his side and no breadth to speak of, just consisting of two more or less fused profiles, and his wheelbarrow was now all bent and broken" (137).

The connection between life and art is made problematic when Shade recycles the same motif in the concluding lines of his poem: "And through the flowing shade and ebbing light / A man, unheedful of the butterfly—/ Some neighbor's gardener, I guess—goes by / Trundling an empty barrow up the lane" (ll. 996–99). It is Kinbote who lives next door to the poet, and his gardener is black (290–92). Having written these lines—having unwittingly sighted a real-life replica of his ancient toy, as it were[42]—Shade leaves the poem, joins his neighbor on the Goldsworth porch, and is instantly shot dead by the gunman ("a sudden sunburst"). The paradoxical suggestion that beings inhabiting the embedded world of fiction are somehow taking part in the killing of their creator is enhanced when Kinbote overtly associates the motif with the killer's person: "our clockwork man" (152); "our 'automatic man'" (279); Gradus's life ended, tells Kinbote, "not in a feeble splutter of the clockwork but in a gesture of humanoid despair" (299).

Kinbote also attempts—heavy-handedly, as was seen—to link the recurrent motif of "grayness" in Shade's poem with the identity of the killer. His efforts turn out to be less tenuous than they first seem when the reader learns that the real murderer was also named "Grey." What is more, veiled anticipations of the shooting occur at various places in the poem. For example, in connection with the TV shows viewed by Shade on the evening of his daughter's suicide: "An imbecile with sideburns was about / To use his gun"

(ll. 468–69). Compare also the next item on the TV program: "A jovial Negro raised his trumpet" (l. 470)—anticipating the motions of Kinbote's gardener when he subdues the gunman with his spade (294). Or compare the mention of Shade's public lecture, during which he suffered a near fatal heart attack (another "sunburst"): "One of those peevish people who attend / Such talks only to say they disagree / Stood up and pointed with his pipe at me" (ll. 688–90).

We come once more to the central metaphor of *azure*. Above, it was observed that from Kinbote's viewpoint this motif serves to tie together Shade's poem and incidents belonging to Zembla. From Shade's point of view, the opening mention of "false azure" evidently functions as an anticipation of his daughter's suicide in Canto Two. But the motif also anticipates Shade's fate outside the poem. After the shooting, Kinbote reports, the poet lay prone on the Goldsworth lawn "with open dead eyes directed at the sunny azure" (295). The notion of *falseness* has been actualized in the killer's error about the identity of his victim. And the continuation of the opening lines suggests the immortality preserved for the poet by his art. Despite his physical death, he "lived on, in the reflected sky" (l. 4).[43]

Nabokov was always wont to expound on the problematic relationship between life and fiction and the capacity of art to transmit intimations of another reality. "It was the shadow of Gogol that lived his real life—the life of his books" Nabokov wrote in *Nikolai Gogol* (1944; p. 26). In his 1937 essay on Pushkin, he similarly underlined the subordination of the poet's life to patterns originating in his art: "The life of a poet is a kind of pastiche of his art."[44] This notion was couched into novelistic form in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, and two decades later, in *Pale Fire*, the tenet was assigned to an invented poet: "*Man's life as commentary to abstruse / Unfinished poem. Note for further use*" (ll. 939–40).

Above, a network of structural linkages was traced through which the interplay between "life" and "art" is actualized in *Pale Fire*. In *Pale Fire*, as in the Shakespearean "pale fire" parable that it incorporates, all narrative planes turn out to be reflected in others. Not only does embedded fiction (Zembla) reflect life in New Wye, and not only is one fiction (the legend of Zembla) reflected in another (the poem), but also Shade's real life appears to emulate designs occurring in his art. It remains to consider the thematic motivation of these linkages within the comprehensive narrative.

Such a discussion should proceed by taking a closer look at the role allotted to Kinbote's narrative voice in the novel. According to Kinbote's own assertion, "it is the commentator who has the last word" (29). And though this statement is ironically qualified in the novel, in a technical sense he is right: his is the editorial level within which all others are contained. This need not mean that the editor (or any other narrative agent) goes about "inventing" everything else in the text, as some critics would have it. But Kinbote's position does grant

him a unique opportunity to verbally adjust his discourse to the embedded texts in the novel.

To take up the most obvious instances, it is certainly Kinbote who is responsible for the many connections linking his everyday existence in New Wye with the fabulous world of Zembla. As obviously, it is the editor who verbally attunes the discourse on Zembla so that its particulars coincide with Shade's poem, despite Kinbote's claims to the contrary. But isn't it again Kinbote who holds full verbal control over the history of Shade's real life? One should mark, for instance, that all descriptions of Gradus (and Grey) are dependent on Kinbote's voice: it is due to his choices that given details in Shade's poem strike the reader as prophetic. The occurrences of the clockwork toy in the poem become portentous only after Kinbote links them with details belonging to the shooting scene. And the motif of "azure" from the first lines of the poem would hardly seem as pertinent to Shade's death, were it not for Kinbote's assertion that after the shooting the poet lay "with . . . eyes directed up at . . . azure" (295).[45] It is possible to claim, therefore, that *while Shade remains in control of the artistic system of the poem, it is Kinbote who is responsible for the system of the comprehensive narrative text as a work of art.*

But if this is accepted (as *one* possibility), what is the reader to make of the novel? What lies behind the huge investment in intra-narrative links? Or: why would Kinbote as a narrator do all this?

One answer resides in his insanity. Kinbote constructs his zany commentary for the sole purpose of proving the thesis that Shade's poem *is* about Zembla and he himself is the fugitive king. This reading explains much about the novel,[46] for as a character in the narrative about Shade and his neighbor Kinbote appears to us as a confirmed madman (compare the testimony of his colleagues on pp. 25, 195, 238, and elsewhere). Still, he is not just a character but a narrator, and it may seem a bit facile to dismiss the narrative designs that he brings about as nothing but a madman's fancy.

Shade warns against such a naive approach when he replies to one of Kinbote's campus detractors: "[Madness] is the wrong word. . . . One should not apply it to a person who deliberately peels off a drab and unhappy past and replaces it with a brilliant invention" (238). Shade also calls his neighbor "a fellow poet" (238).[47] And, in an important passage, Kinbote himself takes up his capacity as a poet: "I do not consider myself a true artist, save in one matter: I can do what only a true artist can do—pounce upon the forgotten butterfly of a revelation, wean myself abruptly from the habit of things, see the web of the world, and the warp and the weft of that web" (289).

This coincides with Shade's own thesis that an inherent order, a "web of sense" (l. 810), underlies man's life. Such an order, he claims, can become manifest through the act of verbal pattern-making: ". . . I feel I understand / Existence, or at least a minute part / Of my existence, only through my art, / In terms of combinational delight . . ." (ll. 970–73)—again a very distinctively Nabokovian notion. Compare "The Paris Poem" (1944): "In this life, rich in

patterns . . . / no better joy would I choose than to fold / its magnificent carpet in such a fashion / as to make the design of today coincide / with the past, with a former pattern" (*PP* 123). Or compare the claim of imprisoned Cincinnatus in *Invitation to a Beheading* that poets "speed along a page and, right from the page, where only a shadow continues to run, [. . .] take off into the blue" (194) or—like Shade—into the azure.

But Shade's life ends in a most senseless manner. Shot dead because of an absurd error, his poem still in a drafted form, the poet perishes while his worst premonitions seem to be coming true: "What if you are tossed / Into a boundless void, your bearings lost, / Your spirit stripped and utterly alone, / Your task unfinished, your despair unknown" (ll. 540–43).

As regards Kinbote, this is precisely the vision that he is countering when he constructs his own verbal structure around the poem. Planting links between the most disparate parts of the text, supplying a meaning to events that would otherwise have remained haphazard, he is nothing if not putting into effect the poetics promulgated by Shade (and Nabokov behind him). Kinbote may be right, after all, in his comical asides, when he tries to shield his creation from the scepticism of "the pedestrian reader" (231). For any reader who refuses to take Kinbote's invention in earnest poses a threat not only to his status as the ruler of Zembla; the incredulous reader is also a menace to the status of art and imagination as purveyors of meaning in human life.

Commenting on one of the multiple coincidences in the narrative, Kinbote may be speaking for all of us when he pleads: "I trust the reader appreciates the strangeness of this, because if he does not, there is no sense in writing poems, or notes to poems, or anything at all" (207).

Pekka Tammi

Notes

1. Kermode, 1982, p. 144. The review appeared originally in 1962.
2. The most often-named thematic precursor is the unfinished novel *Solus Rex* (begun in 1939); for an excellent discussion, see D. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 206–19. For "metaphysics" see the recent studies by Boyd, 1991, pp. 425–56; Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 187–212.
3. This line of argument is shrewdly developed by Torgovnick.
4. *Eugene Onegin*, II, pp. 32–33.
5. References to Shade's poem will be indicated by the line number.
6. Nabokov had finished his commentaries to Pushkin by 1957 (*Eugene Onegin*, I, p. ix). The plot of *Pale Fire* appears to have been first sketched by the author in a letter of 24 March 1957, to a prospective publisher (*SL* 212–13). On analogies between Nabokov's scholarly and fictional works, see Lyons; Hyde, pp. 184–95; Meyer, 1988, pp. 52–64.
7. Nabokov, "Problems of Translation," p. 512.
8. Here I follow Tammi, 1985, pp. 197–221.

9. An analogous figure of the Russian matreshka doll is used by Davydov (1982), who studies instances of this structure in Nabokov but not in *Pale Fire*.
10. See Krueger; Meyer, 1988, pp. 88–98.
11. For some subtextual possibilities behind the name Botkin, see Meyer, 1988, pp. 115–17; Tammi, 1989, pp. 24–25. Additional proof for Kinbote as Botkin has been garnered from outside—but not inside—the novel by Boyd, 1991, p. 709.
12. Outside the novel there are again many possible sources for Zembla. For a fascinating inquiry, see Peter Steiner.
13. Quoted in Boyd, 1991, p. 463.
14. McCarthy, 1982. This is the original article, first printed in *The New Republic* in 1962. An expanded version in the British *Encounter* actually came out before the first British printing of *Pale Fire*. For this version, see McCarthy, 1970, pp. 15–34.
15. Stegner, 1966, pp. 129–30.
16. D.B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, p. 70.
17. Field, 1967, p. 314; see pp. 299–300, 317–18.
18. Ibid., p. 317.
19. Tanner, p. 36; Bader, p. 31; Russell, p. 357.
20. Janeway, p. 71. More recent versions of the ghost reading are found in Rowe, 1981, pp. 26–32; Boyd, 1991, p. 445.
21. McCarthy, 1982, p. 127. See also Grabes, 1977, pp. 61–63; Couturier, 1979, p. 111; Packman, pp. 69–72; A. Wright, pp. 274–275; Haegert, p. 409; Alexandrov, 1991, p. 188.
22. For example, McHale, pp. 18–19.
23. The debate goes on. Compare the review by R. Adams (1992) of Boyd, 1991.
24. Alter, 1975, pp. 185–86.
25. Though not yet in McCarthy's original article. The oversight was repaired in subsequent reprintings (McCarthy, 1970, p. 32). On the Shakespeare subtext, see also C. Williams, 1963, p. 39; Lyons, p. 158; Berberova, "The Mechanics," pp. 154–55; Alter, 1975, pp. 205–207. [Editor's note: see also "Nabokov and Shakespeare: The English Works" in this volume.]
26. First pointed out by C.Williams, 1963, p. 35. See also Meyer, 1988, pp. 113–14.
27. Maddox, p. 32; de Vries, "*Pale Fire* and *The Life of Johnson*," p. 46. This is interesting, because the epigraph also comes from Boswell. For a study of *The Life of Johnson* in *Pale Fire*, see M. Stewart.
28. *Pace* Field (1967, p. 298), who says that "the title . . . has absolutely no relevance to Shade's poem."
29. Compare "The Poets" (1939): here the speaker is preparing to abandon Europe "with the last, hardly visible radiance of Russia / on the phosphorescent rhymes of our last verse" (*PP* 93)—further evidence from outside the novel that Zembla = Russia.
30. If such instances are lumped together, with no regard for the system of embedding, the result can only be the bleak view that "there is nothing very elegant or patterned about a series of coincidences" (Rampton, 1984, p. 158). What we have here is not a random series.
31. *Eugene Onegin*, vol. III, p. 59.
32. Therefore, it is odd not to assign the Index to Kinbote's voice; compare Appel, 1967, p. 32.
33. For more on homosexuality in *Pale Fire*, see Roth, 1975.

34. "The 'normal' conspiracy-mania of a faculty common room" (McCarthy, 1982, p. 127).
35. Field, 1967, pp. 311–12.
36. D. B. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 64–65.
37. As was again first suggested by McCarthy, 1982, pp. 126–27.
38. Some of these are preserved in the Russian translation of *Pale Fire* by Véra Nabokov (e.g. l. 17: "*I posle:* grad*atsii sinevy*" [*Blednyi ogon'*, p. 29]; l. 29 reads "*vsiakii tsvet mog* rad*ovat' menia: dazhe seryi*" [p. 30]). A stylistic study of this, on the whole admirable, translation would be a separate topic.
39. See Barabtarlo, 1989, pp. 235–36.
40. A lemniscate and an ampersand both resemble the figure eight. Alter (1975, p. 189) adds that this figure captures the bipartite shape of the novel (Poem + Commentary). See also J. Levine, p. 105; de Vries, "Some Remarks," pp. 246–47.
41. Compare McHale (p. 115) on postmodern texts that "deliberately . . . mislead the reader into regarding an embedded, secondary world as the primary, diegetic world."
42. The clockwork-toy analogy was first pointed out by C. Williams, 1963, p. 36.
43. In addition, Shade is described in terms of bird imagery. See Walker, 1976, p. 214; Alexandrov, 1991, p. 251.
44. "Pushkin, or the Real and the Plausible," p. 40.
45. Alexandrov (1991, pp. 209–10), who records the same link, says that Kinbote "does not notice" it. But why? It is Kinbote who recorded it in the first place.
46. For readings stressing Kinbote's madness and his "failure" as an artist, see Fowler, pp. 112–21; Pifer, 1980, pp. 110–18; Albright, p. 84; Edelstein, p. 221.
47. Similarly in the cast of characters in the play *The Waltz Invention* (1938), deranged Waltz is termed "a fellow author." Madness in relation to creative art is discussed by Nabokov in *LL* 377.

PLAYS

Vladimir Nabokov will probably not be remembered by posterity as a great playwright. Unlike his poetry and prose, Nabokov's plays belong solely to the "Russian" period of his life. They appeared in Berlin and Paris émigré publications and until recently were not even republished or collected in one volume.[1] Nabokov translated and reworked for an English-speaking audience only one of them, *Izobretenie Val'sa*, or *The Waltz Invention*. After his father's death Dmitri Nabokov translated and published four more plays (*The Man from the USSR*, *The Event*, *The Pole* and *The Grandfather*), but their appearance produced virtually no critical response.

Many would agree with Brian Boyd that "for Nabokov writing for the stage was like playing chess without his queen."[2] Some of his major strengths as a prose writer—the chameleon-like nature of his authorial voice, the foxy mastery in exploiting and manipulating his readers' expectations, and what

Boyd calls "transcending the moment by the sheer force of style"[3]—were severely undercut by the generic demands of drama. And yet, the magic of theater was almost too powerful for Nabokov to resist. "A play is an ideal conspiracy," he wrote in 1941 while preparing to teach a summer course on drama at Stanford. "Even though it is absolutely exposed to our view, we are as powerless to influence the course of action as the stage inhabitants are to see us, while influencing our inner selves with almost superhuman ease" (*USSR* 315).

Nabokov's published dramatic output—seven plays in all—generally falls into two categories: one- or two-act, predominantly blank verse, "closet" dramas, written primarily in the early 1920s, and much longer (three- or five-act) prose plays, written mostly in the late 1930s.

Verse Plays

Nabokov wrote his first verse play early in 1918 in the Crimea, to which he and his family fled after the Bolshevik forces overthrew the Provisional Government in Petrograd. The play was called *Vesnoi* (*In Spring*) and, according to the notes found in Nabokov's archive, represented "a lyrical something in one act."[4] His first published play, *Skital'tsy* (*The Wanderers*) was written three years later and published in 1923 in *Grani*. It is the story of two English brothers, a criminal and an upright citizen, who were separated early in childhood and accidentally meet each other in a London pub in 1768. The play is purported to be a translation of the first act of a four-act play by an obscure English playwright Vivian Calmbrood. This anagram of Nabokov's own name became very familiar to his readers later on, but back in 1921 his father was apparently tricked into believing that Vivian Calmbrood actually existed. (V.D. Nabokov even got worried that his son's "sheer love of literature might make him waste time translating works of no real interest."[5]) Like the other verse plays to follow, *Skital'tsy* is written in iambic pentameter. Unlike them, however, it is not written in blank verse but is rhymed by means of two alternating rhyming patterns (AbbA, cDcD, EffE, gHgH, etc.). That later Nabokov abandoned this rhyming scheme for the sake of the more traditional—Shakespearean as well as Pushkinian—model probably bespeaks the limitations he felt such a strict adherence to rhymes had placed on him.

Nabokov's next play, *Smert'* (*Death*), was published in Berlin's *Rul'* in May of 1923. Like *Skital'tsy*, it takes place in England, but half a century later, and in Cambridge rather than London. While the play is pure fiction, the title is probably related to Nabokov's real-life experience, his father's assassination a year earlier, and reflects his painfully acquired intimacy with death. *Smert'* evolves around a dialogue between a Cambridge don, Gonville, and his student, Edmund, who rushes into Gonville's room upon hearing the news of the death of the don's wife, Stella, with whom, it is revealed later, Edmund was

in love. In the course of their conversation Edmund asserts that he, too, wants to die and asks Gonville to give him the poison which the don has in his possession. Gonville appears to comply, Edmund drinks it, and in act two, where Gonville and Edmund still continue to converse, the reader is purposefully left to wonder as to whether the whole thing (including Stella's death) was a cruel joke, a shrewd maneuver on Gonville's part to elicit Edmund's confession about his love for Stella, or a bona fide otherworldly experience.

Death also features prominently in the other two verse plays published in *Rul'* shortly after *Smert'*. In *Polius* (*The Pole,* 1924), a piece suggested by Nabokov's memory of seeing Robert Falcon Scott's journals at the British Museum, Nabokov visualizes the last hours in the lives of Scott and his companions, explorers of Antarctica who perished on their return from the South Pole in 1912. Russian critic Ivan Tolstoi sees in the play "the model of Russian exile,"[6] while Dmitri Nabokov believes that "[Scott's] pure courage, his passion for the precision and poetry of nature, and his compassion for all that surrounded him were not unlike Father's own."[7] But the play is probably neither about exile nor about Nabokov's own affinity with Scott. It is not Dmitri's father but his grandfather who was most likely Nabokov's inspiration in *Polius.* Like Fyodor's father in *The Gift,* Scott is distinguished from the others by his unshakable belief in progress and his heroic ability to sacrifice himself for the sake of higher ideals—and these were precisely the qualities that Vladimir Nabokov came to associate with his father, Vladimir D. Nabokov.

Dedushka (*The Grandfather,* or, in Dmitri Nabokov's translation, *The Grand-dad,* 1923), is set in nineteenth-century France, but it is again, albeit indirectly, about Nabokov's father. Somewhat reminiscent of *Invitation to a Beheading* in its stark depiction of the banality of evil, it is a play about a noble Frenchman who twice escapes his executioner— a feat of wishful thinking on behalf of a young playwright whose father could not escape his. (In *Invitation to a Beheading* Nabokov will take this theme one step further—and closer to how he imagined his father's ultimate fate—by having a noble character escape his captors *despite* the act of physical execution.)

In addition to these four shorter pieces Nabokov also wrote a five-act verse play, *Tragediia gospodina Morna* (*The Tragedy of Mister Morn*), which, however, was never published. The play is written in unrhymed iambic pentameter and takes place in an unnamed European country some time in the past. Morn, a king who successfully, albeit incognito, rules his country and brings it to progress and prosperity, appears to commit a tragic error when he chooses to flee from death rather than to face it. This single instance of faintheartedness, which leads to his abdication, is redeemed only by Morn's eventually choosing to kill himself at the time when he is about to triumph and prosper again and his love for life reaches its peak. Brian Boyd, who read *Tragediia gospodina Morna* while working in Nabokov's archives, believes it to be "in some ways, the best of all his plays."[8] Nabokov gave a reading of the play in 1924 during

a gathering of the émigré "Literary Club" in Berlin, and parts of it appeared in a lengthy review of his reading in *Rul'*.[9]

Prose Plays

Nabokov wrote his first prose play, *Chelovek iz SSSR* (*The Man from the USSR*), in 1925–26. It consists of five acts, only the first of which has ever been published in Russian (in *Rul'*, January 1, 1927). In 1984 Dmitri Nabokov translated the whole play into English, publishing it together with three other plays in a book with the title *The Man from the U.S.S.R. and Other Plays*. The play was staged only once, in Berlin, by the émigré theater troupe "Gruppa" (The Group) under the direction of Iury Ofrosimov.[10]

Unlike Nabokov's verse dramas, *The Man from the USSR* takes place "here and now": in the émigré Berlin of the 1920s.[11] In its attempt to re-create émigré life the work in fact rivals both *Mary*, which was written around the same time, and *The Gift*, written eleven years later. The reader (and spectator) can catch numerous glimpses of life in the émigré community: from a small Russian restaurant with virtually no clients, and a bare room in a typical Berlin pension, to a rented auditorium, where a poorly attended émigré lecture takes place, and a movie set of yet another silly movie about Russia in which several émigrés serve as extras.

The play's main character, Aleksei Kuznetsov, a "freedom fighter" who went back to Soviet Russia pretending to be an innocuous business man engaged in trade with the Soviets (the play was written at the time of the so-called "New Economic Policy," or "NEP," when such contacts were still encouraged by the Soviet government), somehow got "recruited" as a Soviet agent (the details are never made quite clear) but is, in fact, building a network of anti-Soviet activists there. His wife is left behind in Berlin, worrying about her husband yet heroically enduring their separation and even the pretense of estrangement (to make him less vulnerable to the possibility that the Soviets may use her safety as a weapon against him) because she knows that he is serving the proper cause. The play begins when Kuznetsov comes back to Berlin for a few days and goes to visit his friend who works as a waiter in a Russian restaurant. In the course of the next several days he gets in touch with his wife (who still loves him), starts an affair with a talentless and pretentious Russian actress (ostensibly to re-emphasize his estrangement from his wife, whom, as we find out, he also still loves), talks an elderly couple, who are business failures in Berlin, out of returning to Russia, and finally goes back there himself to face new dangers and possibly death.

The play touched a nerve in the émigré community. A reviewer for *Rul'* declared that "this first drama from émigré life . . . should be considered a success" and drew the following contrast between the passive anti-Soviet feelings in the community and Kuznetsov's heroic actions: "On the one hand—no will power ['bezvolie'], confusion and neurotic chatter with a naive

belief in miracles. On the other, clenched teeth, no sentiments and clever reserve. On the one hand, a proud pose of fierce implacability which is ready, though, to give way to significant compromises. On the other, open cynicism, but of the willful, not compromising type ['volevoi, ne dvoiashchiisia']."[12]

The "open cynicism . . . of the willful . . . type," which the reviewer alludes to, refers to one of the most ethically suspect parts of the play, where Kuznetsov confesses to his wife that he had sacrificed several of his agents in Russia in order to save the organization as a whole: "The Soviet sleuths got wind of something . . . And you know what I did? I deliberately let three people, minor pawns in my organization, go before the firing squad. Don't start thinking I regret it one bit. I don't. This gambit saved the whole project. I knew perfectly well that those people would accept the entire guilt, rather than betray the least detail of our work" (*USSR* 120). Kuznetsov's professed lack of "regret" is rather unsettling. One can argue, of course, as Nabokov probably would at the time, that there are "ends" that truly justify the "means" and that Kuznetsov was, after all, on the right side of the equation. And yet the apparent callousness with which Kuznetsov comes to regard flesh-and-blood human beings as mere "minor pawns" in his struggle is not totally unlike the sentiment that many of his Soviet counterparts held about "minor pawns" in theirs.

Almost equally cynical may be Kuznetsov's affair with Marianna Tal', which he starts largely for the sake of protecting the lie that he and his wife do not love each other any more. The actress is not presented in a sympathetic enough manner for readers or spectators to really empathize with her plight after Kuznetsov ends their affair (we are made to see, however, that she is not taking it well), but it is difficult not to view the woman as yet another "minor pawn" sacrificed with "no regret" by the hero who set his sight on higher goals.[13]

As a play, *The Man from the USSR* is eminently "stageable," even though it involves changing a set five times (but never in the middle of the act). As in most of Nabokov's plays, including the verse dramas, the action here starts *in medias res* (with one of the characters cursing after accidentally hitting himself on the fingernail with a hammer), and things do not get fully explained until the very end of the play. This suspense often breeds heightened expectations which are not quite met at the end. Even to the reviewer for *Rul'*, who generally liked the play and declared it "a success," the end of *The Man from the USSR* appeared to be "somewhat disappointing": "The spectator was made for a long time . . . to climb up a high mountain and hold his breath in anticipation. From the top of the mountain he was hoping to see broad plains. Yet the plains were not there."[14]

Where the play fits within the larger tradition of Russian theater is an open question. In some ways *The Man from the USSR* is quite conventional: its language, for example, is fairly colloquial yet by no means ground-breaking. But many of the features of Nabokov's play are actually more European in nature than Russian. Nabokov's stage, for example, usually holds

no more than two or three characters at a time and in that he is much closer to Ibsen, whom he generally admired, than to either Chekhov[15] or Gogol. His sets, likewise, have a definite touch of modernist simplicity to them. More importantly, there are also some strong cinematographic elements in Nabokov's play which make it look more innovative than many of its "pre-cinema" Russian predecessors. Thus in act one, which takes place in a basement turned into a restaurant, bored waiters try to guess whether the legs they see through the basement window belong to a potential customer. Nabokov's stage directions here are unmistakably "script-like": "There appears, in the strip of window, a pair of legs, which first cross from left to right, then stop, then go in the opposite direction, then stop again, then change direction again. They belong to Kuznetsoff, but are seen in silhouette form, i.e., two-dimensional and black, like black cardboard cutouts. Only their outline is reminiscent of his real legs, which . . . will appear onstage together with their owner two or three speeches later" (*USSR* 39).

After completing *The Man from the USSR* in 1926 Nabokov did not write another play for twelve years, the same twelve years that saw the publication of virtually all his Russian novels. By the time he was ready to try drama again he had fled Hitler's Berlin for the safety of France. Nabokov wrote his play *Sobytie* (*The Event*) for the Russian Theater in Paris, where it was first staged in March of 1938. The play was also published the same year in the Parisian *Russkie zapiski.*

The Event is defined by Nabokov as "a dramatic comedy." Although it has two fewer acts than *The Man from the USSR*, the play is actually significantly longer than its predecessor. It takes place in a Russian, most likely émigré, milieu, but the precise place is left deliberately undetermined. The play is largely about a failed marriage and a vague renewed threat of retribution from the wife's previous fiancé, who is being released from prison where he was serving time for the attempted murder of the couple six years prior to the beginning of the play. The husband, Aleksei Troshcheikin, is a frustrated painter and a coward; the wife, Liubov' (her name means "love" in Russian), is a rather intelligent but embittered woman who is still mourning the death of the couple's two-year-old child three years earlier. The couple lives with Liubov"s mother, a somewhat neurotic, selfish woman and a bad writer, and is often visited by a friend of the family, whom the reader soon discovers to be Liubov"s lover.

Unlike *The Man from the USSR*, which takes place over the course of several days and in five different locations, *The Event* is written with classical unities of time and place in mind: it unfolds during the course of one day and in the same apartment (although in two different rooms). The play starts in Troshcheikin's studio in the middle of his search for the colored children's balls which he needs to complete a portrait of somebody else's son. To Liubov' the balls serve as a painful reminder of the loss of her own son, and the reader thus becomes immediately aware of the tragedy that took place in the family.

The main "scheduled" event of the day is the birthday party for Antonina Pavlovna, Liubov"s mother, but the unexpected release from prison of Liubov"s former boyfriend, Barbashin, soon overshadows everything else and becomes "the event" of the play's title. The whole family and their acquaintances begin to live in total anticipation of Barbashin's imminent arrival and the shooting which is expected to occur. Troshcheikin openly panics and contemplates fleeing, but, for the moment, settles on hiring a private detective to patrol the street in front of his house. Liubov' is both apprehensive and intrigued: she knows that Barbashin shot at them six years ago out of love for her but cannot help thinking of him with a certain amount of fondness. We also learn that she chose to marry Troshcheikin rather than Barbashin because she feared Barbashin's violent temper and believed that Troshcheikin would become a famous artist one day, even though she never felt for him what she had felt for Barbashin.

Throughout the day several acquaintances bring intelligence about Barbashin's movements, and it seems that he is coming closer and closer to the Troshcheikins' house. One of the informants even tells Troshcheikin that a friend of Barbashin was seen buying a gun. The party for Antonina Pavlovna proceeds as scheduled, however, and a whole host of guests arrives at the apartment, with each new ring of the doorbell setting the Troshcheikins' nerves further and further on edge. When the suspense reaches its absolute apogee the play stuns the reader with a truly anti-climactic ending: one of the guests who is not privy to the commotion which took place earlier arrives at the party after everyone is already gone and casually mentions that he saw Barbashin at a train station, "going abroad for good." "He asked me to give his regards to our mutual friends," the guest adds, "but you probably don't know him. . . ."[16]

The play reminds many Nabokov critics of Gogol's *The Inspector General* (*Revizor*),[17] and it is obvious that Nabokov intended the parallel. As in *The Inspector General*, the fateful appearance of an important personage is fervently anticipated without the spectator ever getting a chance to see him (although in *The Inspector General* the expected inspector general does finally arrive). There is also a "silent scene" in Nabokov's play which openly parodies the end of Gogol's comedy. Ironically, even the stage history of *The Event* is reminiscent of that of *The Inspector General*. During the play's premiere the audience apparently was quite enthusiastic through most of the play but got rather bewildered towards the end. *The Event* was declared a failure by émigré papers the following day, and the Russian Theater decided to make their second performance the last. However, the play was received very enthusiastically on that second night, and there were numerous curtain calls. After that performance *The Event* became the talk of Russian Paris, and during the next several years the play was also staged in Russian émigré theaters of Prague, Warsaw, Belgrade, and New York.

Nabokov's play deliberately echoes not only Gogol but also Chekhov. Thus Liubov"s mother, with her sentimental pseudo-artistic nature and selfish lack of concern for anyone but herself, is quite reminiscent of Arkadina in *The Seagull.*[18] In the Troshcheikins' longing to get away from the boredom of their provincial town one can hear obvious echoes of Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, which is actually quoted within Nabokov's piece. One critic, Ivan Tolstoi, also finds that in its emphasis on "geographical" as well as "spiritual provinciality" *The Event* bears "an unmistakable resemblance" to Chekhov's story "Ionych,"[19] while another, Simon Karlinsky, lists a number of Chekhov's stories as being echoed in Nabokov's play.[20]

What has been largely overlooked in Nabokov criticism, however, is that in *The Event* (just as in *The Man from the USSR*), one can detect not only Russian influences but also strong traces of European drama. Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* is of particular interest in this respect since Nabokov's play can be seen as a direct parody of it. Ibsen's strong-minded heroine also forsook a man with "wild" disposition whom she loved (and who reappears during the play) in order to marry a more "stable" man for whom she feels nothing. Like Liubov', Hedda believed that her husband would become famous and prosperous one day, only to realize that he was a man of limited abilities. As in *The Event*, in *Hedda Gabler* there is a "friend of the family" who is positioning himself to become the bored heroine's lover. There are also guns spotted and shots fired. The difference is, of course, that in Ibsen's play all this accumulation of shots, triangles, and unresolved feelings results in two deaths, while Nabokov chooses to end his play not with a bang but with a whimper.

Other matters of interest in *The Event* include a pre-*Pnin* appearance of the theme of a public lecturer who suddenly sees before him faces of people (some of them already dead) from his past, and Nabokov's customary self-reference—here to a "wonderful film," "the best film of the season" called *Kamera obskura*,[21] the supposed film adaptation of his 1932 novel under the same title. Nabokov wrote *Kamera obskura*, which is filled with allusions to film, intending from the very beginning to turn it into a movie. However, his early attempts in Berlin were to no avail. In 1938, as he was writing *The Event*, *Kamera obskura* was about to be published in the United States (with a new title—*Laughter in the Dark*). He had high hopes, therefore, which he playfully reveals in *The Event*, that Hollywood would see the novel's merits and make a "wonderful film" out of it.[22]

The immediate critical response to Nabokov's play was mixed. Characteristic in this respect was Vladislav Khodasevich, who actually wrote two reviews of the play within several months. The first, a brief mention appearing in July of 1938 in *Vozrozhdenie*, was largely negative. Khodasevich criticized Nabokov for his failure to find the proper balance "between a very gloomy essence of the play and its emphatically comic style," and suggested that "from a literary point of view [the play] does not belong to the best works of the author."[23]

But then the critic appears to have changed his mind. In a lengthy review published in *Sovremennye zapiski*, Khodasevich noted that the play, while "not requiring a strenuous intellectual effort" was, nevertheless "of good artistic quality ('khudozhestvenno dobrokachestvenn[aia]')." He also no longer necessarily saw as a failure the imbalance between the gloominess of the play and its comic nature; instead he interpreted it as a testimony to "Sirin's fierce pessimism ['pronzitel'nyi pessimizm']: everything in the world is trivial and morally corrupt ['poshlo i griazno'], and it will always remain this way." Mindful that his readers might be surprised at such a turnabout, Khodasevich hastened to explain that it was not only the play but also the reaction to it of the public that helped him form his second critical opinion: "It is impossible to say that *The Event* was immediately welcomed with overwhelming praise . . . but what is interesting and positively noteworthy is the fact that the play stirred a lively, sometimes even heated exchange of opinions, and that during its performances the theater was packed with people who obviously came there not just in order to kill time."[24]

Other reviewers were not quite as generous. Lidiia Chervinskaia, writing for *Krug*, concluded that Nabokov's language in the play "sounds false and difficult to pronounce." She also went on to say that theatrical speech in general is "devoid of adjectives" and is "verbal ['glagol'naia']" in its nature, and that it is Nabokov's failure to distinguish between the language of prose and the language of drama that dooms his play as a theatrical production.[25] Chervinskaia's pronouncement obviously bothered Nabokov, for three years later, when already in the United States and preparing for his lectures at Stanford, he tried to explain his notion of theater by directly contradicting hers: "There exists an old fallacy according to which some plays are meant to be seen, others to be read. True, there are two sorts of plays: verb plays and adjective plays, plain plays of action and florid plays of characterization—but apart from such a classification being merely a superficial convenience, a fine play of either type is equally delightful on the stage and at home" (*USSR* 319).

Of all of Nabokov's plays, *Izobretenie val'sa*, or *The Waltz Invention*, which was published during the writer's lifetime, is both best known and most commented on. And yet it is, perhaps, the weakest of his longer plays. Nabokov wrote the play, which turned out to be his last, soon after *The Event*, and it was published in the November 1938 issue of *Russkie zapiski*. *The Waltz Invention* was to be performed by the same Russian Theater that staged the earlier play and to be directed by the same director, Iury Annenkov. In his Foreword to the English translation of *The Waltz Invention* Nabokov blamed World War II for interrupting the rehearsals of the play but, in reality, it was Annenkov's withdrawal from the production that put the play in jeopardy and led to its cancellation.[26]

Unlike *The Event*, *The Waltz Invention* is not about émigré life; instead Nabokov tries to create a highly imaginary country with enough of Hitler's

Germany and, perhaps, Stalin's Russia in it to make it interesting. "Waltz" turns out to be the name of the main character, a mad scientist who seeks an audience with the country's Minister of Defense in order to tell him about his new invention: an awesome explosive device which makes whole cities and mountains disappear. We are made to believe that he actually succeeds in convincing the minister and everyone around him of the reality and power of his invention and that, as a result of his device, he becomes the supreme ruler of the country, if not of the whole world. This lasts until the very end of the play when we realize that Waltz is still sitting in the Minister's waiting room merely dreaming. An "ideal reader" should not be totally surprised by such an outcome since Nabokov almost gives it away by naming Waltz's wily chief assistant in the play "Son," Russian for "dream," but Nabokov knew perfectly well that "ideal readers" exist only in writers' imaginations. In addition to an unexpected ending, which Nabokov frequently used as his own "explosive device," the play has other typically Nabokovian features—the country's government, for example, consists of a whole series of interchangeable doubles with very similar names (Grab, Grob, Gerb, Grib, etc.).

Although fairly straightforward and even simplistic in its essence, *The Waltz Invention* has some interesting twists to it. Thus Salvador Waltz is depicted not as a scientist who wants to make money out of his devastating invention but as a "peacenik" of sorts who is trying to save the world by putting an end to all wars. When, in his dream, he attains power, the result is quite predictable—the idealist is soon transformed into a petty and capricious tyrant who cares about nothing but his own pleasures: luxury and women.

Nabokov appears to have thought of Waltz as somewhat of "a tragic figure." "As his waiting room dream unfolds . . . ," he wrote in his Foreword to the English translation, "there occurs now and then a sudden thinning of the texture, a rubbed spot in the bright fabric, allowing the nether life to glimmer through. Why is he such a tragic figure? What upset him so atrociously when he sees a toy on a table. Does it bring back his own childhood?"[27] But there is hardly enough meaning and poignancy to Waltz to make him a tragic hero of any kind; he is much closer, in fact, to a parody of one.

The Waltz Invention can be seen in some ways as a reversal of *The Event*: there, the basic tragedy of unfulfilled human lives paraded as "comedy," here, what amounts to a lighthearted artistic prank is supposed to evoke in us a sense of impending catastrophe. Whether it succeeds or not is a matter of some debate. Boyd describes the play as a "lightweight nightmare . . . [and] a succession of comic one-liners and dramatic sight gags"; but he also sees in it "a study in insanity" and "a fable about the puerility of political or any other dreams."[28] Field interprets *The Waltz Invention* as "a play about mistaken intention, political and sexual," and even goes so far as to detect in it not only certain touches of Hitler's Germany but also definite echoes of "Russian

political life under Nicholas," which, he assures us, "was quite as mad as that shown in *The Waltz Invention*."[29]

Other critics are not as charitable. When Nabokov showed his play to Edmund Wilson in 1943, Wilson was blunt: "Mary [McCarthy, Wilson's wife at the time] and I have both read it and think it not one of your best productions. I doubt whether you could get it produced. The first scenes amused me, but I don't think there is enough to the idea to make it last through three acts—also the unreality of everything gets on the reader's nerves before he understands that it is all a fantasy in the madman's mind; when he does find that out, he feels sold" (*NWL* 99).

Wilson's strong reservations about the play may have postponed Nabokov's plans for publishing it in English, but in 1964 he did ask his son Dmitri to help him translate the piece, and then worked on it some more in order to "adapt" it to a new audience and new times. The translated and revised play was published in 1966. Nabokov probably chose *The Waltz Invention* rather than his other long plays because it had a universal, not strictly émigré, setting. However, from an artistic point of view either *The Man from the USSR* or *The Event* might have been a better choice. The play did not age well, and Nabokov found himself in a tricky situation: he saw that the play's pacifist theme might appeal to the anti-Vietnam crowd of the 1960s, but he absolutely did not want to be identified with their movement. Thus he attempted to downplay the political overtones of his play. He identified Waltz in "Dramatis Personae" as not only "a haggard inventor" but also "a fellow author," and assured his readers, "most emphatically," that the play's publication in English "has no topical import." "Nor would I have attempted to invent my poor Waltz today," he went on to say, "lest any part of me, even my shadow, even one shoulder of my shadow, might seem thereby to join in those 'peace' demonstrations conducted by old knaves and young fools, the only result of which is to give the necessary peace of mind to ruthless schemers in Tomsk or Atomsk."[30] If the play did not work well as a denunciation of political evil, it seems to work even less well as a play about "art," or, as Simon Karlinsky puts it in a rather conciliatory fashion, as "a portrait of an artist as a madman politician."[31]

Miscellaneous Drama

Nabokov's dramatic works also include a libretto, written in 1923, and a conclusion to an unfinished dramatic work by Pushkin, which Nabokov wrote in the United States.

The libretto, *Agasfer* (*Ahasuerus*), was written in collaboration with Ivan Lukash to fit a symphony by the émigré composer V. F. Iakobson. Only the "Prologue," authored by Nabokov, was ever published.[32] The collaborators called *Agasfer* "a dramatic pantomime in five parts" and it was described by a reviewer in *Rul'* as a "romantic epos about Love, which wanders the earth like

the eternal wanderer Agaspher."[33] Like Nabokov's earliest published verse play, *Skital'tsy* (*The Wanderers*), the prologue is composed in rhymed iambic pentameter, except that the rhythmical pattern is not quite as regular.

Nabokov's conclusion to Pushkin's *Rusalka* (*The Water Nymph*) was published in New York's *Novyi zhurnal* in 1942. Pushkin worked on this play in verse during the 1820s and 1830s but did not finish it. The play was given its title and published after his death. *Rusalka* is based on a familiar legend about a heartbroken poor maiden, the daughter of a miller, who was seduced and then abandoned by a prince about to marry a woman of his own social class. The miller's daughter throws herself into the river and turns into a water nymph. Her lover soon realizes that he cannot live without her and goes back to the mill where the distraught miller tells him about his daughter's fate. The miller also tells him about a little water nymph, his granddaughter, who comes to the shore to take care of her grandfather. In the last finished scene of the play we visit the bottom of the river where the water nymph and her daughter discuss the reappearance of the prince. The maiden-turned-water nymph tells her daughter that the prince is really her father and asks her to go ashore and tell him that the miller's daughter is awaiting him. When left alone, the water nymph declares that she is seeking revenge. The play breaks off abruptly with the prince beholding the little water nymph and asking her where she came from ("Otkuda ty, prekrasnoe ditia?"[34]). Pushkin used the same legend in "Pesni zapadnykh slavian" ("The Songs of the Western Slavs," 1834); there, however, the water nymph does not seek revenge but simply refuses to oblige the prince and come out of the water to be his love again.

Nabokov's conclusion is seventy lines long and is written in the same blank verse iambic pentameter as the rest of the play. Instead of the water nymph's revenge, however, we are treated to a truly happy ending, where the prince follows his daughter into the river to be reunited with his true love, and other water nymphs sing and invite the moon "to come to a river wedding." The scene ends with Nabokov's playful stage directions: "They [i.e. the singing water nymphs] disappear. Pushkin shrugs his shoulders."[35]

"The end I tagged on," Nabokov wrote to Wilson the same year, "is in perfect keeping with the general ending of all legends connected with mermaids . . . Pushkin never broke the skeleton of tradition,—he merely rearranged its inner organs,—with less showy but more vital results." Edmund Wilson was surprised, however, that Nabokov did not give in to a temptation to be more of a "jester": "Knowing your tendencies as I do, I was rather surprised that you handled it so soberly. I thought at first that the prince was going to refuse to believe the child, dismiss the whole story as preposterous and send the little nymph about her business" (*NWL* 67, 63). Yet Wilson did not know Nabokov quite as well as he thought he did: it would never do, as far as Nabokov was concerned, to "caricature" Pushkin. He was much too sacred.[36]

Galya Diment

NOTES

1. Most of the plays have been recently published in Russia in one volume—*P'esy*, ed. Ivan Tolstoi, 1990.
2. Boyd, 1990, p. 482.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 141
5. Ibid., p. 187.
6. Tolstoi, "Nabokov i ego teatral'noe nasledie," in Nabokov, *P'esy*, p. 21.
7. Dmitri Nabokov, "Nabokov and the Theatre" (*USSR* 11–12).
8. Boyd, 1990, p. 222. For more on the play and its unfortunate fate (apparently a significant part of it was lost when the Nabokovs gave the manuscript to the Library of Congress), see Boyd, 1990, pp. 222–26.
9. See *Rul'*, 5 April 1924, p. 6.
10. Ofrosimov, who was looking for good material based on émigré life for his "Gruppa," actually commissioned Nabokov to write the play.
11. In Berlin the play was advertised as "scenes from émigré life"; see Boyd, 1990, p. 263.
12. Brodsky, p. 3. Unless specified otherwise, all translations from the Russian are mine.
13. Some Nabokov critics, however, do not feel that such actions in any way diminish Kuznetsov's stature as a hero. Thus Boyd (1990, p. 267) finds that the play "leaves us with a sense that despite all that may seem bleak or dubious in the emigration, in the age, in human life itself, there are things like kindness and courage and love that make apparently sordid circumstances heroic, and connect somehow with an elsewhere beyond the margins of our stage, beyond our last farewells." The theme of a Russian émigré going back to Russia to face an almost certain death will reappear in Nabokov's *Glory* (1932).
14. Brodsky, p. 3.
15. Boyd (1990, p. 264) finds some echoes of Chekhov in *The Man from the USSR* but also notes that Nabokov stops short of letting the Chekhovian mood overtake the play: "Nabokov could have created from the emigration's enforced stasis a mood of Chekhovian inactivity or a choric yearning for 'Moscow.' Instead, there is frenetic pace and bustle, and barely time to think of old Russia."
16. *Sobytie*, p. 104. The Russian reads: "Prosil klaniat'sia obshchim znakomym, no vy ego, veroiatno, ne znaete," which Dmitri Nabokov translates as "He asked me to say hello to our mutual friends, but you wouldn't know him, I'm sure" (*USSR* 263). I did not use this translation here because "I'm sure" is much too strong for the Russian "veroiatno," which means "probably."
17. Just to give a few examples—"With a whole series of qualifications . . . *The Event* can be seen as a variant of *The Inspector General*" (Khodasevich, "'Sobytie' V. Sirina," p. 425); "*The Event* is simply a reversal of *The Inspector General*" (Field, 1986, p. 189); "What a closer examination of Nabokov's comedy reveals . . . is that its structure is in fact a kind of free variation on the main *peripeteia* of *The Inspector General*" (Karlinsky, 1967, pp. 186–87); "*The Event* evokes Gogol. As in *The Government Inspector*, a new fact [*sic*] in a provincial town throws the characters into a state of frenzied consternation that lasts the duration of the play, until the final disclosure" (Boyd, 1990, p. 483).

18. Simon Karlinsky, in an article devoted mostly to *The Event* and *The Waltz Invention*, also hears echoes of Chekhov's other heroine, Liubov' Ranevskaia from *The Cherry Orchard*, in Mrs. Troshcheikin's lament about her little son (Karlinsky, 1967, p. 187).
19. In Nabokov, *P'esy*, p. 36.
20. See Karlinsky, 1967, pp. 188–89.
21. *Sobytie*, pp. 45, 52.
22. His hopes were not immediately realized, but in 1942, when already in the United States, Nabokov did manage to sell the film rights to the novel for $2,500. In 1962, with Hollywood interested in *Lolita*, there was also talk of Roger Vadim directing Brigitte Bardot in *Laughter in the Dark*, but that, too, did not come to fruition. The film was finally produced in 1969 and was directed by Tony Richardson, who changed the setting from Berlin to London. For Nabokov's thoughts on the movie and its tortuous history, see *SO* 137, 162. See also Boyd, 1991, pp. 89, 464.
23. Khodasevich, "Knigi i liudi," *Vozrozhdenie*, 22 July 1938, p. 9.
24. Khodasevich, "'Sobytie' V. Sirina," pp. 423–25.
25. Chervinskaia, p. 170. Iury Annenkov, who directed the play, held a vastly different opinion of Nabokov's language. "Sirin is an incredible master of spontaneous dialogue," he told an interviewer in 1938. "*The Event* is written in uniquely lively, common language" (quoted in Nabokov, *P'esy*, p. 273).
26. For the reasons for Annenkov's withdrawal, see Boyd, 1990, p. 494.
27. *The Waltz Invention*, pp. 2–3.
28. Boyd, 1990, p. 489.
29. Field, 1986, pp. 15, 23.
30. *The Waltz Invention*, pp. 4, 1. Nabokov used the same rhymed combination of "Tomsk or Atomsk" in one of his published public lectures, "Russian Writers, Censors, and Readers" (*LRL* 10).
31. Karlinsky, 1967, p. 185.
32. In *Rul'*, December 2, 1923, p. 6.
33. Ibid. The review is signed with the initials "L. S. Ia."
34. Pushkin, *Rusalka*, p. 385.
35. Nabokov, *Rusalka*, p. 184.
36. Highly typical for Nabokov's adulation of Pushkin is the instance in *The Gift* where he makes Fyodor sternly admonish the imaginary Koncheyev for even mildly criticizing Pushkin: "Leave Pushkin alone: he is the gold reserve of our literature" (*Gift* 72).

PNIN

Nabokov's fourth English novel differs from the rest both structurally and generically. The only one to have been serialized in large part (in *The New Yorker*, chapters 1, 3, 4, and 6, between November of 1953 and November of 1955), *Pnin* as a book (1957) has been regarded by many, beginning with a

baffled publisher who had turned its manuscript down, as a string of more or less detachable story-length episodes, not really congealing into a "novel." It is quite likely that such was an early plan, for the first available mention of the novel confirms, in Nabokov's June, 1953, letter to Edmund Wilson from Oregon, that he has "started a series of stories about a creature of [his], a Professor Pnin" (*NWL* 282).[1] But soon he would firmly protest a version of this formula when others applied it to *Pnin*: "it certainly is *not* a collection of sketches" (*SL* 178).[2] The contradiction will be removed not by pointing out the quibbling difference between the story and the sketch ("I do not write sketches," mutters Nabokov in that letter to Pascal Covici) but upon remembering that Nabokov's notion of an artistic whole differs principally from the accepted one and rests on the plotting of thematic lines rather than on that of fabular and character development. Nabokov's characters seldom change in the course of the book, certainly never the way they do in Dickens's or Tolstoy's hands. With this notion in mind, one can say that the chapters of Nabokov's memoir published serially in the same *New Yorker* a few years before *Pnin*, each with a self-supportive structure of a short story, also form a "novel" insofar as they engage, once assembled in *Conclusive Evidence*, a system of inbuilt thematic interlinks that sustain the complex. And so does *Pnin*, whose "inner core," says Nabokov, "is built on a whole series of inner organic transitions" (*SL* 156–7). The difference between the two books lies really in the relative proportion of creative and re-creative impulse, imagination and memory.

Habent sua fata libelli pro capite lectoris,[3] and *Pnin* has always had a gam of admirers who enjoy the novel's hilarious yet touching modus and in general consider it "warm"—even though they may be indifferent to other novels by the same author. Placed, chronologically, between Humbert and Kinbote and in sharp contraposition to either, Pnin has little command of the English idiom, and his verbal gawkiness spins fabulously amusing situations. And as even the first-time reader realizes very quickly, Pnin, notwithstanding his bungles and odd look and pedantic air, is very attractive because in that trio of successive foreign academics he is the only sane and compassionate human between self-centered and perverted madmen.[4] Besides, unlike the other two protagonists, Pnin *does not narrate his story*; instead, the story of his life is narrated by an odd personage, N., and since the burden of proof is always on the narrator, this feature is of great psychological influence and conceptual and technical importance (this will be taken up later).

There is one peculiar thing about the novel that is easy to overlook, and yet much of the book's "warmth" felt by the average reader familiar with, but generally insensitive to, Nabokov's art issues from the fact that *Pnin* is his only novel, English or Russian, wherein nobody dies "on stage," in the course of the narration. Curiously enough, Nabokov had meant, even in the fairly late stages of composition, to have his Pnin die after all. In 1954, outlining for Viking his plan for the book, he projected *ten* chapters, in the last of which the author would arrive at the scene "to lecture on Russian literature, while poor Pnin dies,

with everything unsettled and uncompleted" (*SL* 143). He was, of course, to change his mind and not only spared his hero but promoted him to a secure position in his next novel, *Pale Fire*; yet premeditative steps of the original plan can be discerned in the attacks of a singular chest trouble overwhelming Pnin towards the end of chapters 1 and 5 and in Pnin's turning over Pushkin's lines on death in chapter 3 ("'In fight, in travel, or in waves?' Or on the Waindell campus?"). No less would the fan of *Pnin* be disturbed if he learnt that Nabokov had sent the first chapter to *The New Yorker* with this character reference: "He is not a very nice person but he is fun."[5] This is a strange remark indeed, for even in the opening chapter Nabokov takes great care to display some rare and admirable qualities of Pnin's heart, such as his ability to be concerned with others in the midst of his own calamity (he inquires about the baggage man's pregnant wife after having botched, partly because of that man, his last chance to get to Cremona in time for his lecture). But in another letter (to Viking) Nabokov corrects that slip of the tongue and explains that his purpose was "to create a character, comic, physically inattractive—grotesque, if you like—but then have him emerge, in juxtaposition to so-called 'normal' individuals, as by far the more human, the more important, and, on a moral plane, the more attractive one [. . .] a character entirely new to literature" (*SL* 178).

Several essential conditions of *Pnin* are, if not entirely new to literature, then very uncommon. Thus the novel employs a stupendous number of participants (well over three hundred) at the same time *completely offsetting* the ochlophobic sensation peculiar to other overcrowded books (such as *Ulysses*) by means of regular and carefully dosed injections of ephemeral yet very much alive personae who usually enter and exit the novel within one syntactic period and who have little or no bearing on the plot.[6] Time management is marked by several interesting features as well, for instance the extreme compression of time as the novel unwinds (the first three chapters span almost two and a half years, the next four less than a year); ingenious flashbacks and timeslides in each chapter; and a certain chronological duplexity from deliberate use of both calendar styles, nowhere to stronger effect than in chapter 3, where "Pnin's Day" (his birthday, February 15, ignored by Pnin because of the academic routine and calendar confusion) may be really the day of Pushkin's death (February 10), and Pnin's premonition of death, mingled with Pushkin's melancholy lines, colors the chapter and informs it as a dominant theme.[7]

Almost every serious study of *Pnin,* however, has concentrated above all on two capital and interdependent problems: its *thematic design* and its *narrative strategy*, with various artistic, moral, and philosophical explications,[8] and so the forthgoing remarks dwell on and around these important topics.

Only very early and shallow critics thought *Pnin* to be little else than a book of stories about a quaint character, loosely strung together by progressive chronology. This false impression, as has been said already, owes much to each chapter's having a well-rounded composition which looks perfectly self-

sufficient, whereas the strong mutual dependence of the chapters is hidden and becomes evident only on closer inspection. Each chapter of what was then provisionally named *My Poor Pnin*, whether published by *The New Yorker* or not, had its own title (1. "Pnin"; 2. "Pnin Had Not Always Been Single," turned down as "too depressing"; 3. "Pnin's Day"; 4. "Victor Meets Pnin"; 5. "Pnin under the Pines," turned down because of several strong anti-Soviet digs;[9] 6. "Pnin Gives a Party"; and 7. "I Knew Pnin," apparently never offered for separate publication), and for the readers of the magazine version this circumstance strengthened the notion of the book's modular frame. Nabokov must have sensed that danger, and after Viking had rejected *Pnin*, in part because of its fragmentary structure, he thought it fit to point out to the next potential publisher that "these chapters, although slanted and illumined differently, fuse to form a definite unity at the end" (*SL* 182).[10]

In few respects does Nabokov tower more above most other novelists than in his art of compositional arrangement, particularly the thematic concinnity of interactive motifs achieved through subtle "organic" transitions and carefully staged recurrence of certain details. *Pnin* consists of seven chapters. Unlike his other English books after *Bend Sinister*, Nabokov composed *Pnin* in natural sequence, from the beginning to the end. The parts making up its structure fit with uncanny coordination. "*Pnin* is as complicated as a pet snake," says one critic,[11] and the simile is especially apt since the composition does indeed bite its own tail—or the shadow of a tail. The thematic route describes a full circle ending as it does with a different version of the very episode that opens the book, Pnin's guest lecture at a Women's Club. Etiological links stretch from one chapter to another, spotlighting some detail in retrospect. For example, Pnin's brown suit bought by the tortuous experience of the first chapter is dismissed by Liza as improper in the second, and her casual remark dropped as Pnin is helping her into the fur coat becomes the last injury of the absurdly cruel visit. But there are thematic lines that run the entire length of the novel surfacing in every chapter in various guises. The network of such long-range lines, together with the local ones, is very intricate in plan, its crosscutting strings reaching far and near and suggesting a deliberate design and a designer responsible for it. Far from being an idle and clever game, this design points to philosophical possibilities beyond the realm of fiction.

One such long-range string ties together the important theme of optical reflection. In chapter 1 it is "the gleam of a tumbler, the brass knobs of [Pnin's] bedstead" which "interfered even less with the oak leaves and rich blossoms than would the reflection of an inside object in a windowpane with the outside scenery perceived through the same glass" (24). Pnin sees this in a mesmeric flashback, and one must not overlook here an additional motif of aberration, of a slight but insuperable incongruity between things perceived and things reflected, which after all is at the base of one of the book's possible interpretations. The general distortion of Pnin's life as related by the narrator N. somehow corresponds to these optical refractions. On the other hand, Cockerell,

a lesser fictionist himself, tells the story of Pnin in a rapid series of slapstick anecdotes that depict the genuine Pnin with much less clarity than the "Petite Histoire" of Russian culture (Pnin's research in interminable progress) "reflect[s] in miniature [. . .] Major Concatenations of Events" (76). Chapter 2 has "the slow scintillant downcome [. . .] reflected in the silent looking glass" (34). In chapter 3, when Pnin raises his tired eyes from the book and trains them on the window above, "through his dissolving meditation [. . .] there appeared the violet-blue air of dusk, silver-tooled by the reflection of the fluorescent lights of the ceiling, and, among spidery black twigs, a mirrored row of bright book spines" (78). In contrapuntal chapter 4, the theme of reflection swells especially large. What seems at first glance a purely technical topic grows in scope and significance on second reading and becomes a model of the plot growth. The focal point falls on pages 98–99 (the novel's exact geometric center), where Victor experiments with reflections of various objects which change their shape, if not essence, when seen through water. In chapter 5, a detailed description of the mansion lingers on the "morose étagères with bits of dark-looking glass in the back as mournful as the eyes of old apes" (124), which brings to mind the "microcosmic version of a room [. . .] in that very special and very magical small convex mirror that, half a millennium ago, Van Eyck and Petrus Christus and Memling used to paint into their detailed interiors" (97–98). In chapter 6, another description of the house interior includes "a pair of crystal candlesticks with pendants [. . .] responsible in the early mornings for iridescent reflections, which glowed charmingly on the sideboard and reminded my sentimental friend of the stained-glass casements that colored the sunlight orange and green and violet on the verandas of Russian country houses" (145–46). And chapter 7 contains an extensive review of this theme (along with many others), and can be read as an elaborate metaphor of this train of images, being as it were an enormous looking glass which reflects Pnin's life with an indefinite degree of distortion. "There is a focal shift here," says Nabokov in his lecture on Proust's novel, "which produces a rainbow edge: this is the special Proustian crystal through which we read the book [. . .] Proust is a prism. His, or its, sole object is *to refract*, and by refracting to *recreate* a world in retrospect" (*LL* 210, 208; italics added).

Another emblematic image appearing in every chapter with scheduled regularity is the squirrel, which in *Pnin* forms a more complete pattern than the posy of violets does in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, or the oblong puddle in *Bend Sinister*, or the sunglasses in *Lolita*. One critic sees in the squirrel a metempsychic incarnation of Mira, Pnin's dead fiancée, whose specter interferes in his life at critical turns.[12] Another has recently proposed that the pattern of the rodent's appearances offers "a number of possible metaphysical answers to the problem of human pain" which is the cardinal problem in the novel.[13] Thus in the opening chapter the squirrel, pyrographed on the bedscreen in Pnin's recaptured childhood, fantastically turns into a live one squatting near him in his present, after "the panic and the pain are over,"

and it may signify that Pnin's pain "here is not part of some wantonly malevolent design but a means of extracting the treasures of the character's private past and our present pity."[14] There seems to be a correspondence between the squirrel's visiting a chapter and Pnin's appointed misfortune, immediately passed or immediately pending. In chapter 2 in particular he encounters the squirrel at a quickly vanishing point when he suddenly senses that he is on the verge of grasping at last the all-resolving principle of the universe (*his* world), the key to his existence—perhaps, the fact of his being the subject of a masterly invention, the squirrel's persistent reappearance being the proof and tell-tale emblem.

The existence of an involute thematic design concealed from the hero (because he is part of it) is evident to the re-reader; but does its meaning extend outside its governance, outside its trail that winds through all seven chapters? In other words, has the Squirrel Theme a special allegoric mission, besides sharing in the general symbolism of all artistic expression? Not necessarily. However persistently such images may recur they need carry "no burden of meaning whatsoever other than the fact that someone beyond the work is repeating them, that they are all part of one master pattern."[15]

The cosmos of *Pnin* is unique in that it consists of *two* master patterns, one inside the other, and any solution of its nonplus requires brackets around the narrator's subsidiary design, to separate it from Nabokov's embracing one. One astute reviewer saw it at once: "[Nabokov is] a practitioner whose relations with his narrators and theirs with their characters are so irregular as to make the sacred 'point of view' emit rabbits like a hat."[16]

The figure of Pnin's narrator is the most elusive in the novel and in this respect has rivals only in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* and *Pale Fire.* At first blush the problem seems rather trivial. "At the end of the novel, I, V.N., arrive in person to Waindell College to lecture on Russian literature, while poor Pnin dies, with everything unsettled and uncompleted." At the time of this pronouncement (early 1954) only two chapters of *Pnin* had been completed, and just as Nabokov resolutely re-charted his hero's fate in the course of composing the rest of the book, so he did the character of the narrator. In a letter to the same correspondent written after the book was finished Nabokov puts distancing quotation marks around the "I" of the story (*SL* 178),[17] pointing up a very important strategic idea. The personified narrator, whose more or less intrusive presence shows itself from the very beginning, and who in a sense supplants his hero in the final chapter by shifting sharply the focus of narration—this narrator is brought teasingly close to being confused with his maker. He has the same name and patronymic, and his surname begins with an N; like Nabokov, he was born in April of 1899 in the "rosy-stone house in the Morskaya" in St. Petersburg; he is an "Anglo-Russian" writer of note, professor, and an expert in butterflies; and he shares with Nabokov artistic, cultural, and political convictions. Some finer biographical hachures diverge (N.'s Baltic aunt and her estate where he spends the summer of 1916; certain

details of his émigré peregrinations in Europe; N.'s apparently single status when he arrives at Waindell). But the radical difference that Nabokov sets off emphatically, the one that required placing the "I" in the letter to Covici under the convoy of inverted commas, lies in the moral realm (which, by the way, makes doubly striking the likeness between *Pnin*'s narrator and another fictional V.V.N., the "I" of Nabokov's last novel, *Look at the Harlequins!*, who lists, among other writings of his, a novel called *Dr. Olga Repnin*). N.'s various remarks regarding Pnin, the way he tells the story of his affair with Liza, the fact of his publishing Pnin's disarmingly frank letter to Liza (and the flippant manner he chooses to dress it) suggest a good measure of snobbishness of bearing, callousness of heart, vanity of mind, and general lack of charity—faults that only a very hostile biographer would find in Nabokov; a conscientious one would see abundant proof of exactly opposite traits. It is this very perception of himself as the like of *Pnin*'s narrator that Nabokov disavows in his last Russian poem which ends in a parody of unscrupulous characterization: "'N.—pisatel' nediuzhinnyi, snob i atlet, nadelennyi ogromnym aplombom'" (N. is a rather good writer; is arrogant and athletic; and is endowed with enormous self-assurance).[18]

One cannot help wondering whether this not very pleasant N., whom Pnin, in the last chapter, calls an "uzhasnyi vydumshchik," a "dreadful inventor," is the "evil designer" mentioned in the first chapter, manipulating or reinventing Pnin's life in a biased narration—and almost every student of the novel has posed that question.[19] The six episodes related by N. follow a similar compositional plan which, on a larger scale, is also a paradigm for the entire book. At the beginning of each we see a serene Pnin, totally unaware of impending doom, ignoring its numerous signs. Then the clouds gather, and he invariably faces an unforeseen contretemps that usually occurs close to, but *not quite at,* the end of a chapter. At the very end of this presumably objective narration (end of chapter 6) Pnin is shown composing a letter whose opening line, "permit me to recapitulate," sets up a perfect transition to the final chapter which does recapitulate and in a sense rephrase the whole story. In chapter 7 the narrator recollects his previous encounters with Pnin and revives, in minute and fascinating detail, the first time he saw him as a schoolboy in St. Petersburg, then, as a vacationing student on N.'s grandaunt's Baltic estate, and later in emigration. But when N. set about amusing Pnin "and other people around [them] with the unusual lucidity and strength" of his memory by recounting the first two anecdotes, Pnin "denied everything" and affirmed that they had *never* seen each other before. Here, needless to say, the reader faces a dilemma of utmost urgency: Did N. make up these episodes (and perhaps others as well)? Or did Pnin refuse to own them because he was "reluctant [. . .] to recognize his own past" (180)? Either proposition harbors an internal contradiction. Even if N. were a "dreadful inventor" concocting amusing stories about acquaintances simply to flaunt his awesome memory, he certainly would not do it in front of the victim of the fabrication who would

instantly expose it. On the other hand, if N.'s stories be true, why should Pnin want to gainsay them? After all, there is nothing particularly injurious in N.'s version of Pnin's boyhood, neither in that A-plus in Algebra that Pnin protests, nor even in the story of his playing the part of the betrayed husband in Schnitzler's play, for any possible connection with the disaster of Pnin's future marriage would be anachronistic at that point in the novel. There is, of course, a strong argument, repeatedly pointed out by interpreters, that N.'s version sets off at every step the dissimilitude between his first-class childhood and Pnin's "middle-class" one and, in general, the contrast of his good fortunes against "his poor Pnin"'s misfortunes. One special area of opposition is the English language—for Pnin, a crude and treacherous tool of tortuous communication in a thoroughly foreign land, while for N., a rich and powerful means of artistic expression which, among other things, enables him to create the story of Pnin's poignant first love, tragic marriage, his sterling heart, his lame English.

This line of argument, convincing in itself, cannot however resolve any of the important incongruities. How can N. hold that he and Pnin had met twice before their Paris rencontre when Pnin flatly denies it? What does Pnin mean when he later accuses N. of having invented that they "were schoolmates in Russia and cribbed at examinations," whereas, in fact, N. said nothing of the sort? What can possibly allow the acting narrator prying access to Pnin's childhood memories, or to his intimate broodings in the Waindell park, or indeed to his dreams? And, significantly, how is N. supposed to be at liberty to "publish" this book about Pnin, his private sorrows and all, if Pnin does not die in it? The obvious answer to the last two questions would be that the whole of *My Poor Pnin* is as much the fruit of N.'s creative imagination as the whole of *Pnin*, enveloping both N. and his book, is the fruit of Nabokov's. If so, the reader ought to fight the illusion of "everything spiral[ing] off into nebulous relativity" and of N.'s "playing the Red King to Pnin's Alice."[20]

This concentricity resembles somewhat the essential riddle of *Pale Fire*; however, with the hero alive and without the much-revealing Foreword and Index of the later novel, *Pnin* does not seem to admit of any other philosophically cohesive interpretation. Its inner contradictions, which are especially glaring within and *between* the first and last chapters[21] (they are of reversed polarity, as it were), cannot be explained satisfactorily on the novel's turf. In order to see the concentric circles of its design the reader ought to gain an elevated vantage point—indeed he is prompted to do so by a rather straightforward analogy when, at the beginning of chapter 5, Pnin's meanderings through a maze are observed from a "prospect tower." The narrator and the hero never appear on stage together (but they do in the pluperfect of N.'s memories): it seems that they cannot coexist on the same plane, as if one should except the other.[22] The narrator, just as Pnin, is but a "fictional character [. . .] like Pnin he is legible but nonexistent."[23]

At the apex of the first chapter N. confesses: "Some people—and I am one of them—hate happy ends. We feel cheated. *Harm is the norm. Doom should not jam*" (25; italics added). This brusque and vocal formula (its four short nouns trying on as they do four different vowel sounds before the "m") is, however, suspended by Nabokov who at the end of the opening chapter, as well as at the end of the novel, clears Pnin's way of ultimate harm (notwithstanding Cockerell's attempt to reinstall it retroactively in the very last sentence, or N.'s frantic attempt to stop Pnin at the exit), securing for his hero safe conduct out of the novel—and, as it turns out, into the next one.

Seventy-seven reviews of the novel appeared in English in the first half-year, most of them momentary. In general, *Pnin* has fallen under somewhat less vigorous study than Nabokov's other English novels, perhaps because of its seemingly (but deceptively) straight sailing. The situation has changed recently, however, what with the appearance of important studies in Toker, 1989, and Boyd, 1991, and the publication of a book-length treatise (Barabtarlo, 1989).

Gennady Barabtarlo

NOTES

1. I suspect that the novel was begun on May 18, because that was Pnin's birthday in the magazine publication of chapter 1, later changed to February 15.
2. Letter to P. Covici, 29 September 1955.
3. Editor's note: "Books have their own destiny, depending on the way they are read," Terentianus.
4. Cf. Meyer, 1988, p. 217.
5. Letter to Katharine White, cited in Boyd, 1991, p. 225.
6. For Nabokov's theoretical treatment of this "Gogolian" device see his *LRL* 19–23. See also Hyde, and Barabtarlo, 1989, pp. 16–17 and Appendix A, "Dramatis Personae."
7. See Barabtarlo, 1989, pp. 15–16, 121–23, and Appendix B ("Chronograph").
8. These matters receive special attention in several studies. See particularly Nemerov; Gordon; Field, 1967; Nicol, 1971; Grams; Connolly, *Pnin*; Garrett-Goodyear; Barabtarlo, 1989; Toker, 1989; and Boyd, 1991.
9. See Boyd, 1991, p. 270.
10. Letter to Cass Canfield of Harper and Brothers, 8 December 1955.
11. Nicol, 1971, p. 197.
12. Rowe, 1981, pp. 62ff.
13. Boyd, 1991, p. 282.
14. Ibid., p. 283.
15. Appel, 1991, p. xxviii.
16. Nemerov, p. 314.
17. Letter to P. Covici, 29 September 1955.
18. "Akh, ugoniat ikh v step' . . ." *Stikhi*, p. 299.

19. Gordon (p. 154) views things contrariwise: the "sympathetic narrator" is overwritten by the villainous author!
20. Grams, p. 194.
21. E.g., Pnin's Baltic aunt (ch. 1) becomes N.'s grandaunt (7); ham actor Khodotov (1) becomes Ancharov (7); and the Whitchurch station worker Bob Horn turns into Robert Horn, N.'s grandaunt's German steward.
22. More on this theory in Barabtarlo, 1989, pp. 35–43.
23. Toker, 1989, p. 26.

POETRY

Nabokov began his career as a poet, and of his published poems over 400 were written before he had completed his first novel, *Mary*, at the end of 1925. Nevertheless, his verse attracted extensive attention only after his death. While occasional reviews in the émigré press, dating mostly from the 1920s, took note of his verse,[1] the only substantial treatment of the Russian poetry to appear during his lifetime was by Gleb Struve (1956), who dealt extensively with the poets who appeared to have influenced Nabokov; he also found an enormous chasm between the early and less mature poetry (that written before 1930) and the later works. Although Nabokov wrote some poetry in English shortly after his arrival at Cambridge in 1919, he turned seriously to English for his poetry only during World War II. However, as opposed to his experience with prose, which he wrote almost exclusively in English during the second half of his life, he continued to write occasional poems in Russian. In translating verse that had been originally written in Russian, he was also far more selective than with the prose. Symptomatic of the relative standing of his prose and poetry, neither of the collections of verse (1959 and 1970) that he published when he had already gained fame for *Lolita* inspired scholarly publications.

At the time of his death Nabokov had been preparing a volume of his Russian verse for publication: *Stikhi* (*Verses*). Its appearance in 1979 led to two articles: Setschkareff (1980) explicates four essential themes that predominate in the collected poetry, while Rabaté (1985) looks for links between Nabokov and the Russian poetic tradition, at the same time insisting, *pace* Nabokov himself, that there are distinct differences, both in terms of theme and manner, between the poetry and the prose. Since 1990, a flurry of articles and of introductions to collections of the poetry attest to a continuing, indeed growing, interest in his verse. The one major cluster of articles on Nabokov's poetry appeared in the final issue of *Russian Literature Triquarterly* (no. 24, 1991); they include, among other items, G.S. Smith's analysis devoted to the formal features of Nabokov's verse,[2] a chronological survey of the poetry by D. Barton Johnson, and highly useful lists of the poems (compiled by Johnson

with the assistance of Wayne Wilson) that complement the information in Juliar (1986).

The critical literature that does exist is in near-unanimous agreement that Nabokov's poetry does not stand comparison with his prose in terms of artistic accomplishment. The relatively early judgment by Khokhlov is typical: "Sirin's verses are distinguished by the same subtlety, care and acumen in their language as his prose. But the quality that makes the fabric of his prose works strong and solid causes the conventional material of poetry to become overly straightforward and dry."[3] Struve finds something in Nabokov's early mastery of versification that is reminiscent of the much maligned nineteenth-century poet Benediktov (interestingly, Nabokov himself more than once compared Pasternak, not his favorite poet, to Benediktov as well).[4] More recently, there have been occasional dissenting voices; Vladimir Soloukhin has bluntly stated that he prefers the poetry to the novels and feels that Nabokov's poetry is on a par with that of Khodasevich.[5] Yet even those who do not share Soloukhin's enthusiasm for the poetry would agree that it repays study—not just for the sheer bulk of his poetic output, but because poetry, after all, is the genre in which Nabokov first tested his literary skills and because individual poems, at least, are worthy of attention on their own.

Still, that sheer bulk is impressive. Well over 500 poems in Russian are known, along with some twenty or so in English. While the great majority of the published works have been identified by now, those poems probably represent only some fraction of the verse Nabokov actually wrote. One researcher has claimed that "[b]y 1928 Nabokov had written . . . nearly a thousand poems."[6] Boyd notes that in 1918 Nabokov had selected 224 poems (out of over 300) for an unrealized collection, only one of which appears in the 1979 collection; also, several notebooks, containing much unpublished verse, survive from the Crimean period (1917–19). Elsewhere Boyd has mentioned "a mass of still-unpublished juvenilia."[7] Nabokov referred to the thirty-nine Russian poems translated in *Poems and Problems* as "represent[ing] only a small fraction—hardly more than one per cent—of the steady mass of which I began to exude in my youth . . ." (*PP* 13). Thus the mass of juvenilia may indeed have been extensive, even allowing for some exaggeration on Nabokov's part. Still, the operative term here is juvenilia. Nabokov took the opportunity to review whatever poetry he had in his archive when preparing the 1979 *Stikhi*. Of that material, he selected some forty-seven previously unpublished poems;[8] the rest remained in his notebooks. Thus the available poems, even if not the complete *oeuvre,* include virtually all those that Nabokov felt worthy of publication, and they provide a clear picture of his development as a poet, of the themes that predominate in his verse, and of the poems' distinguishing features.

In *Speak, Memory* (215–27) Nabokov describes the circumstances in which he composed his first (no longer extant) poem during the summer of 1914 and reveals some of his views on the art of poetic creation. His earliest published poem appeared in the prominent journal *Vestnik Evropy* in 1916; it

was included that year, along with sixty-seven others, in his first collection, called simply *Stikhi* (*Poems*). These poems dealt in large part with the theme of youthful love, specifically for Valentina Shulgina (who appears as Tamara in *Speak, Memory*). Two years later Nabokov, along with a school friend, Andrei Balashov, published *Al'manakh: Dva puti* (*Almanac: Two Paths*), with twelve poems by him and eight by Balashov. Nabokov later rejected most of his earliest verse; no poems from his first volume and just one from the second reappeared in subsequent collections.

The late 1910s and the early 1920s were by far his most prolific period; as near as can be judged, virtually all his unpublished poetry was written during these years and so was the great majority of his published work—about 125 of his known poems date from 1923 alone. While only a small portion of the poetry from this period appeared in his next two collections, even that selection did not hold up well in his later estimation: *Stikhi* contains only seven of the thirty-six poems in *Grozd'* (*The Cluster*, 1922) and just thirty-two of the 153 poems from *Gornii put'* (*The Empyrean Path*, which came out just a month later, in January 1923).

After 1925 he published far fewer poems, but he valued them much more highly. The twenty-four poems that accompanied the stories collected in *Vozvrashchenie Chorba* (*The Return of Chorb*, 1929) include a single poem from 1923, just three from 1924, and less than a third of the published poems from 1925 itself; however, the book contains about half the poems that had appeared from 1926 through 1928. As in the preceding volumes, Russia, and specifically the notion of exile from Russia, figures prominently, though the titles point as well to a concern with nature and to presenting specific moments or scenes ("Vesna" ["Spring"], "Siren' " ["The Lilac Bush"], "Snimok" ["A Snapshot"], "Komnata" ["The Room"]). A few poems are purely lyrical, but most often Nabokov introduces a narrative line. He began a 1927 review of several poetry collections by stating that ". . . in my view a poem needs a plot just as much as a novel."[9] Thus "Rasstrel" ("The Execution," 1927) presents the poet's recurrent dream of being led off to be shot; "Ten'" ("The Shadow," 1925) is that of a tight-rope walker performing in a town square who disappears into the night. These poems and several of the others convey a strong hint of the mystical or at least the mysterious; the verse exudes a sense of wonder, of gazing beyond ordinary reality. Nabokov's poetry begins to take on some of the aura of his prose, creating a more satisfying and more profound body of work.

In the preface to his next collection of verse, *Stikhotvoreniia 1929–1951* (*Poems 1929–1951*), which contains just fifteen works, Nabokov claims that the 1929 poem "K muze" ("To the Muse") marks the end of his youthful art. That poem is in fact about change: the poet talks of the imperfect lines of his happy youth as contrasting with the polished verse of his maturity, when he worries about ambition. It is indeed possible to discern developments in his post-1928 poetry: the presence of some realm other than our own becomes more prevalent, and, in part owing to the continuing effort to tell a story in his

verse, Nabokov's poems, on average, increase in length over the latter part of his career.

Whether 1925 or 1928 should be taken as the line dividing "early" and "mature" in Nabokov's poetic career can be debated; however, he clearly felt that his verse improved as the years went on. Thus in the introduction to *Poems and Problems* (13–14) he talks of "several distinctive stages: an initial one of passionate and commonplace love verse (not represented in this edition); a period reflecting utter distrust of the so-called October Revolution; a period (reaching well into the 1920s) of a kind of private curatorship, aimed at preserving nostalgic retrospections and developing Byzantine imagery . . . ; a period lasting another decade or so during which I set myself to illustrate the principle of making a short poem contain a plot and tell a story . . . ; and finally, in the late thirties, and especially in the subsequent decades, a sudden liberation from self-imposed shackles, resulting both in a sparser output and a more robust style."

His final two collections lend support to this preference for the verse of the last two stages, especially the final one. Thus the thirty-nine Russian poems that he translated for *Poems and Problems* include all fifteen from *Poems 1929–1951* and nine from *The Return of Chorb*. At the same time, he also shows a tendency to rethink his attitude toward some of his earlier poetry by including a few previously unpublished poems.[10] In preparing the much larger 1979 *Stikhi*, he showed a similar tendency: all but one of the poems from *The Return of Chorb* and all those from *Poems 1929–1951* are included, but they, along with the handful of works from his earlier collections, comprise only about one-third of the book. No fewer than 170 of the poems in *Stikhi* had never before been collected, and, as mentioned, nearly fifty of those had not even been published. In the volume's preface Véra Nabokov mentions that he had not managed to make a final, stricter selection. Had he done so, it is possible that less of his previously uncollected work would have made it into *Stikhi*, but he clearly felt that much of the uncollected verse was at least worthy of serious consideration, at the same time that he had second thoughts about the value of many poems in his first books.[11]

Nabokov's direct pronouncements about verse, if taken too literally, would hardly inspire confidence in his abilities as a poet. When describing the composition of his first poem in *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov notes that in Russian iambic poetry it is easy to write lines in which "a long, wriggly adjective would occupy the first four or five syllables of the last three feet of the line" (220). Thus the multi-syllabic Russian equivalents of "pensive" and "anguished" are cited as favorites for beginning poets. Nabokov's words seem to be as more of a warning than a prescription, though in "Eshche bezmolvstvuiu" ("I Still Keep Mute"), published in *The Empyrean Path* and reprinted not just in the 1979 *Stikhi* but also in the even more selective *Poems and Problems*, three of the eight lines exhibit just this structure, employing the adjectives "zaoblachnye" ("beyond the clouds"), "predutrennem" ("pre-dawn") and

"neizbezhnye" ("inevitable"). Nabokov occasionally, but fortunately not always, did take the conventional path in creating poetry.

In *Poems and Problems* (15) Nabokov justifies combining poems and chess problems in a single volume, claiming that "[c]hess problems demand from the composer the same virtues that characterize all worthwhile art: originality, invention, conciseness, harmony, complexity, and splendid insincerity."[12] A tendency to see poems as constructs, as the products of an intellectual game, can also be detected in his fascination with Andrei Bely's idiosyncratic views on Russian rhythm, which comes out both in Nabokov's *Notes on Prosody* and in *The Gift*.[13] The latter, which contains another comparison between composing chess problems and verse (182–84), mentions youthful experiments in which he tried to compose poems with as many unstressed ictuses as possible (163). Bely's notion was that the various patterns of unstressed ictuses he detected in iambic tetrameter verse had some kind of inherent aesthetic value. An effort by Nabokov to create such an effect can be seen in his early "Moia vesna" ("My Spring," 1921). The final stanza presents an extreme version of the tendency that persists throughout the poem, with each line exhibiting stress on only two of the four ictuses: "I, nad tobóiu proletáia, / bozhéstvenno ozarená, / pust' ostanovítsia rodnáia, / neiz"iasnímaia vesná!" For the poem as a whole just under 70% of the ictuses are stressed, still a relatively low figure. Clearly, the predominance of long words is not accidental here, but whether the result can be said to enhance the poem is open to question.

This example of Nabokov's experimentation with verse form should not be taken as symptomatic. As G. S. Smith (1991) has shown, Nabokov's poetry is quite conservative in its use of forms (see also his article in this volume). Beginning to write during a time when many poets were using meters other than the conventional binary (iambic and trochaic) or ternary (anapests, amphibrachs and dactyls) lines, Nabokov instead largely followed the practice of his beloved nineteenth-century predecessors. His poetry is largely iambic, and among the iambic measures he shows a strong preference for the tetrameter. The rhythm of his lines, except for the probably Bely-inspired tendency to stress ictuses somewhat less frequently than the norm, is hardly innovative. Nabokov also shows a strong preference for the more traditional exact rhyme, making only occasional use of the approximate rhyme found in much poetry of his day. He is equally conservative in his choice of stanzaic forms, overwhelmingly favoring quatrains rhyming AbAb (with capital letters used for rhymes that cover two syllables; see the above quotation for an example of such a quatrain). Nabokov is hardly alone among twentieth-century poets in his approach to form: Vladislav Khodasevich, arguably the most prominent poet of the emigration and one of the figures most admired by Nabokov, was if anything even more conservative in his choice of meters, vastly favoring the iambic tetrameter over all others (Smith, 1982). As with Khodasevich, Nabokov's avoidance of virtually all the formal innovations that characterize twentieth-century verse can be seen as a statement in and of itself.

And, perhaps, as Smith suggests Nabokov also regarded formal experimentation as more typical of poets who were to the left politically and therefore rejected it in part for non-aesthetic reasons.[14]

Yet it is important to bear in mind that Nabokov was well aware of the formal devices available to poets of his day and could make use of them to good effect. Salient instances occur in "Vecher na pustyre" ("Evening on a Vacant Lot," 1932; *Stikhi* 246–48). This work is one of only two polymetrical poems in Nabokov's canon;[15] the other, "Slava" ("Fame," 1942; *Stikhi* 265–68) also belongs to his late period. In "Evening on a Vacant Lot," written, it would seem, to mark the tenth anniversary of his father's death, Nabokov uses different meters to divide the seventy-line poem into distinct sections. He begins with variable trochees (freely mixing tetrameter and pentameter lines) to describe a state of feeling lost as he sets out to write the poem (lines 1–25), switches to iambic tetrameter when he discusses writing poetry in his youth (26–38), employs anapestic trimeter to present idyllic memories of what appears to be the family estate in Russia (39–58), and ends with variable iambs back in the present with a waste-strewn vacant lot and a vision of his dead father (59–70). Smith points out that Nabokov, with his overwhelming preference for exact rhymes, tends to cluster his approximate rhymes in particular poems, with a specific purpose in mind each time.[16] At the very beginning of "Evening" Nabokov uses the most exact type of rhyme possible, repetend rhyme: *nébo-nébo* and *oknóm-oknóm*. Any repetend rhyme itself is unusual; to begin with two such rhymes immediately calls attention to the line endings. After the first dozen lines the non-masculine rhymes are predominantly approximate. He uses truncated feminine rhyme (in which one word in the rhyme pair lacks a consonant after the rhyme vowel): *besposhcháden-rádi*, but most notably he turns to heterosyllabic rhyme, in which one word of the rhyme pair is feminine (where the rhyme vowel is one syllable from the end) and one dactylic (with the rhyme vowel two syllables from the end): *odinóchestvo-nóchi, pámiat'iu-plámia, súmerki-úmer*. These rhymes would be more typical for Maiakovsky, who used heterosyllabic rhyming almost to excess. Here Nabokov apparently employs approximate rhymes to highlight his own agitated state as he reflects on his youth and on the death of his father. Such occasional departures from nineteenth-century norms in his poetry are all the more striking for standing out against the background of his generally traditional versification.

The verse that Nabokov originally wrote in English similarly leaves a general impression of formal conservatism. The fourteen poems in *Poems and Problems* are representative. Nabokov favors tetrameter measures, usually iambic, though several of the poems are trochaic. The rhythms are usually very regular and can verge on a "sing-song" effect; cf. the second stanza of "The Room": "It had a mirror and a chair, / it had a window and a bed, / its ribs let in the darkness where / rain glistened and a shopsign bled." The stanzas are usually quatrains rhymed abab, though the handful of English poems do

exhibit some variety: two written in couplets; one each with three-, five- and six-line stanzas; the fourteen-line *Onegin* stanza, appropriately enough, for "On Translating 'Eugene Onegin' "; and a couple of non-stanzaic works. His rhymes tend to be exact and often predictable; thus the first few rhyme pairs in "A Discovery" are *land-sand*, *grass-pass*, *new-blue*, and *tinge-fringe*.

And yet, as with the Russian poems, a closer look reveals that Nabokov is by no means averse to employing less traditional formal elements. The first two English poems ("A Literary Dinner" and "The Refrigerator Awakes," both dated 1942) in *Poems and Problems* consist of variable amphibrachs and variable mixed ternaries, respectively—both relatively unusual for English poetry. "Exile," an uncollected poem also from 1942,[17] contains two twelve-line stanzas, with amphibrachic tetrameter and trimeter lines alternating in a fixed pattern (443443 . . .) that matches the rhyme scheme (aabccbddeffe). "Lines Written in Oregon" consists entirely of three-line stanzas which alternate masculine and feminine triple rhymes (aaa BBB ccc DDD . . .), another form not typical of English verse. In "Ode to a Model" he employs approximate rhyme: "tartan" is rhymed with "outward," "parody" with "parapet," and even "firebird" with "diaper."

In a letter to his brother Kirill, written circa 1930, Nabokov implied that the study of verse form presented no difficulties whatsoever: "As you see, this is all simple and can be assimilated in five minutes, with no need for any textbooks" (*SL* 9). However, his attention to rhythm, his occasional experiments with complex verse forms, and his ability to use modern rhyme techniques when he wished, all suggest that in this regard, as in many others, it is necessary to approach his own words with care. Similarly, skepticism should be applied to Nabokov's oft-repeated assertion that prose and poetry differ little. In an interview Nabokov once stated bluntly that "I have never been able to see any generic difference between poetry and artistic prose . . . The magic of prosody may improve upon what we call prose by bringing out the full flavor of meaning, but in plain prose there are also certain rhythmic patterns, the music of precise phrasing, the beat of thought rendered by recurrent peculiarities of idiom and intonation" (*SO* 44). Rabaté, after quoting this same passage, has argued that there is a difference, that the poetry is more associated with the Russian cultural tradition, with Russia itself, while the prose is characterized more by a break with his homeland and his Russian heritage.[18] Rabaté insists that the poetry should be seen as an integral part of Nabokov's work, not as a marginal activity on his part, and that in discussing the poetry and prose one is talking not of opposed phenomena but of two poles within a single body of work.[19]

Not all will agree with the details of Rabaté's argument, but his basic point is significant. When Nabokov describes the similarities between poetry and prose, he emphasizes formal parallels: the use of rhythm, the care taken with idiom and intonation. Rabaté argues that there is a distinction, which he feels is revealed not so much in questions of style as in the themes and the echoes

of literary tradition. Furthermore, in some instances the differences should be seen as more that of emphasis than of pure opposition.

One theme, surely prominent in the prose, but which receives a special treatment in the poetry, is "potustoronnost'," the "other world." Véra Nabokov herself singles this out as her husband's chief concern in her introduction to *Stikhi*, and it is highlighted as well by many of those who have written on the verse.[20] Connolly points out in regard to this and other themes that the poetry can seem to provide a more open expression of Nabokov's personal vision than his prose.[21] Thus the notion of the other world in his poetry arises both in metaphysical or at least abstract speculations regarding some realm or dimension beyond our own, as well as in musings about the nature of inspiration, in some of the love poetry, and in particular in poems about his homeland. The word itself turns up in one of Nabokov's very last poems, "Vliublennost'" ("Being in Love"), which appears in his novel *Look at the Harlequins!* (25–26). There Nabokov refers to the work as a "philosophical love poem" and suggests "the hereafter" as a translation of "potustoronnost'." His English paraphrase of the poem's last stanza reads "I remind you that [being in love] is not wide-awake reality, that the markings are not the same . . . and that, maybe, the hereafter stands slightly ajar in the dark." In part, then, this theme deals with an altered state that implies the perception of something beyond what a person normally sees: hence it is a feature of his poems that involve visions ("Evening on a Vacant Lot") or dreams. He twice uses the title "V raiu" ("In Paradise," 1920 and 1927; *Stikhi* 40, 195) to describe the soul's existence after death. It is no coincidence that five of his published poems have the word "Son" ("Dream") at the beginning of the title, and others have the plural form ("Sny"), the synonym "Snovidenie," or "Videnie" ("Vision").

Nabokov's concern with the relationship between our world and some other beyond it continues into his English poems. "The Ballad of Longwood Glen," which Nabokov, in asking *The New Yorker* to reconsider its initial rejection, called "the best poem I have composed" (*SL* 208–209), echoes the tone of the earlier "In Paradise" and also provides a particularly telling example of what Nabokov described as the "robust style" of his late poetry. Written in jaunty rhymed couplets, the narrative describes how a florist named Art Longwood goes on an outing with his wife, their two children, and "Art's father, stepfather, and father-in-law." Art throws a ball into a tree; when the ball does not drop back down, he climbs into the tree to retrieve it, and disappears forever. The tree is eventually felled and the ball located in a nest, but no trace of Art is to be found: "Mrs. Longwood, retouched, when the children died, / Became a photographer's dreamy bride. // And now the Deforests with *four* old men, / Like regular tourists visit the glen; // Munch their lunches, look up and down, / Wash their hands, and drive back to town." The poem seems extremely light at first glance, but as Nabokov promised in his letter, "all kinds of interesting shades and underwater patterns will be revealed to the persevering eye." Is Art meant to stand for "art" that somehow

moves into a realm beyond this world?[22] Just what inspires his escape, if indeed escape it is? How to reconcile the lighthearted tone with the dark events (Art's disappearance, the unelaborated death of the children)? The poem's mysterious hint of another realm, the grotesque disjunction between tone and content, and the multiple possible readings evoke comparisons with Nabokov's short prose.

The poems often deal with more than one theme; a particularly frequent combination is that of "potustoronnost'" and exile from Russia. The topic of exile, with its inherent reference to two worlds, the "there" of Russia and the "here" of exile, has led Iury Levin (1990) to apply the term "bi-spatiality" ("bispatsial'nost'") to describe this theme in both the poetry and the prose. Many of Nabokov's early émigré poems deal with exile in a relatively straightforward manner, simply bemoaning the separation from his homeland and expressing a nostalgic yearning to see it again; more and more, though, an element of mystery, of "potustoronnost'" creeps into these poems. Thus in "Lyzhnyi pryzhok" ("The Ski Jump," 1926; *Stikhi* 179–80) the narrator imagines what it would be like to jump not 74 meters, but some 900 miles and end up back in Russia. In "Dlia stranstviia nochnogo mne ne nado . . ." ("For journeying at night I do not need . . ." 1929; *Stikhi* 217–18) the poet's "passportless shadow" lands on Russia's shore and visits the places he once knew. More ominous are the dreams in "The Execution" of actually returning to Russia and being shot at a ravine. In "K Kn. S.M. Kachurinu" ("To Prince S.M. Kachurin," 1947; *Stikhi* 278–81) the poet has come back to Russia disguised as an American priest and finds himself frightened to be in the land of the Soviets. Thus the other world of Russia assumes a dual significance: on the one hand, it represents the idyll of the poet's youth and lures him home; on the other, as Soviet Russia, it presents a very real danger, so that to return, except perhaps via one's shadow, could well mean to disappear as mysteriously and just as absolutely as Art Longwood.

The third major theme that can be found in much of Nabokov's best verse throughout his career is that of poetry itself and the role of the poet. The significance of "To the Muse" as marking a turning point for his verse has already been cited. "Poetu" ("To the Poet," 1918), the opening poem of *The Empyrean Path*, is equally important for revealing Nabokov's inclinations while still a young poet. As with much of the early poetry, apostrophe appears throughout; this seemingly old-fashioned trope, which pervades not just Nabokov's love poetry but also much of his verse on Russia, may help explain his reluctance to include many of the early poems in his later collections as well as the relative critical neglect of that poetry.[23] "To the Poet" seems almost embarrassingly direct; yet, perhaps for that very reason, it can be taken as a primer for Nabokov's views. He begins by calling on the poet to "leave the marshy swamps of mellifluous nonsense," and goes on to say that he should employ precise words ("slovami chetkimi") and not abuse three-syllable rhymes or "broken measures" (the *dol'nik*, or perhaps accentual verse in

general). The narrator rejects the empty peal and vagueness found in modern verse, announcing, "I hear a new sound, I see a new land." The call for clarity and the attacks on the new verse forms indicate that Nabokov's dislike of much contemporary poetry was present from the start and foretell the path that his own poetry will take.

Numerous poems include comments about the writing of poetry (the second section of "Evening on a Vacant Lot"), about verse form, and about the way in which poetry is perceived. The second line of "Kak blednaia zaria, moi stikh negromok . . ." ("Like a pale dawn, my verse is soft . . . ," 1923), contains the words "zvukovoe bytie" ("the existence of sound"), cited by Smirnov as an excellent definition of Nabokov's poetry, which is "not an addendum to the writer's great prose, but something kindred to it."[24] In "Razmery" ("Measures," 1923), an uncollected poem dedicated to Gleb Struve, Nabokov characterizes each of the traditional Russian meters (the "measured amphibrach," the "bells and swallows" in the trochee, etc.). "An Evening of Russian Poetry" (1945), an English poem written in rhymed iambic pentameter and a marvelous imitation of a lecture, complete with questions from the audience, contains some fine lines about the sound of the Russian pentameter and about the nature of rhyme in Russian. The examples could easily be multiplied; in his poetry as in his prose, Nabokov's art is often concerned with art itself.

These themes are joined by, and again often intermingle with, others. The poems on love, which sometimes deal as well with Russia and a nostalgia for the past, predominate among the earliest verse and account for a large portion of his output into the 1920s. The first stanza of an early poem in English, the understandably uncollected "Remembrance" (1920) may serve as an example: "Like silent ships we two in darkness met, / And when some day the poet's careless fame / Shall breathe to you a half-forgotten name— / Soul of my song, I want you to regret." The Russian love poetry at least occasionally reaches a higher level, most often when the focus is less on love than on Russia or on nature. Indeed, some of the better poems from the 1910s and early 1920s are precisely those which focus on nature: the 1920 "Vesna" ("Vzvolnovan mir vesennim dunoven'em . . .") ("Spring" ["The breath of spring has aroused the world . . ."; *Gornii put'* 82]) or "Zhuk" ("The Beetle," 1922), in which a rose is perfectly happy with the insect and has no need for the poet's verses. Given Nabokov's lepidopterological interests, it is not surprising that poems in which butterflies or moths appear comprise an entire subcategory of his nature poetry—cf. "Babochka" ("A Butterfly," 1917–22; *Stikhi* 60) or "Esli v'etsia moi stikh . . ." ("If my verse flutters . . . " 1918; *Gornii put'* 41), where the creation of verse is compared to an emerging butterfly spreading its wings. The nature poetry (which often, particularly in the earlier poems, contains nostalgic references to pre-revolutionary Russia) presents outstanding examples of the sharp vision and eye for detail that is characteristic of his poetry from the start; it is this feature, as much as any other, that bridges the "chasm" between

his early and late verse.[25] Thus "Berezy" ("Birches," 1921; *Gornii put'* 153) describes the shady lilac spiderwebs that cover the grass; the much later "Na zakate" ("At Sunset," 1935; *PP* 86–87) describes, in Nabokov's own translation, a "bench with [a] half-rotten board, / high above the incarnadine river."

Two other subsidiary yet recurrent themes should be mentioned. In talking about the "Byzantine imagery" that appears in many poems of the 1910s and 1920s Nabokov says that "this has been mistaken by some readers for an interest in 'religion,' which, beyond literary stylization, never meant anything to me" (*PP* 13–14). Even if he is to be taken at his word, the number of poems with religious motifs is striking; to cite just a few examples from *The Empyrean Path*: the cycle of nine poems under the general heading of "Angels"; "Tainaia Vecheria" ("The Last Supper," 1918); "I videl ia: stemneli neba svody . . ." ("And I saw the firmament darken . . . ," 1918), and "Na Golgofe," ("On Golgotha," 1921).[26] The religious poems tend to deal with Christ or with angels (and in these cases hint at the theme of another world). The former group, despite Nabokov's claim to the contrary, seems to show an interest in and sympathy for the figure of Christ that goes beyond mere stylization. For instance, the poem in *Cluster* written for the anniversary of Dostoevsky's death describes Christ and his apostles walking past the worm-filled corpse of a dog. The others turn away and mutter that the dog's death was what it deserved; in contrast, Christ says simply that its teeth are like pearls.

The other prevalent theme is memory, which is closely connected to the nostalgic quality of many poems on Russia and on love. It too is equally important for the early and late Nabokov, from the 1919 "V Egipte" ("Ia byl v strane vospominan'ia . . .") ("In Egypt" ["I was in the land of Memory . . . "; *Gornii put'* 56]) to the 1938 "My s toboiu tak verili . . ." ("We so firmly believed . . ."; *Stikhi* 258) and beyond. This theme could also be said to be crucial for many of Nabokov's longer poems, which tend to include autobiographical elements. Examples include "Detstvo" ("Childhood," 1918; *Gornii put'* 92–97), "Krym" ("The Crimea," 1920; *Gornii put'* 107–111), two poems with the title "Peterburg" ("Tak vot on, prezhnii charodei . . ." ["So there he is, the former sorcerer . . . ," 1921] and "Mne chuditsia v Rozhdestvenskoe utro . . ." ["On Christmas morning I imagine . . . ," 1923], *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* 299–303, 323–25), *Universitetskaia poema* (*A University Poem*, 1927; *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* 449–76), "Nochnoe puteshestvie" ("The Night Journey," 1931; *Stikhi* 238–42), "Slava" ("Fame," 1942; *Stikhi* 265–68), and "Parizhskaia poema" ("The Paris Poem," 1943; *Stikhi* 270–74).[27] The subject matter of the first four is clear from their titles: "Childhood" presents an idyllic picture of Nabokov's life at age eight; "The Crimea," written in the ten-line stanza typical for an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century ode, describes the natural features of the region in equally idyllic tones after mentioning Nabokov's hasty departure from that peninsula during the Civil War; and the two

Petersburg poems, the first more darkly than the other, use memory to recall specific details of his beloved city.

A University Poem illustrates Nabokov's efforts at narrative verse: using Nabokov's own student life in Cambridge for the setting, this poem has a developed (presumably fictional) plot, which describes the romance of a Russian student with an English girl and is notable for combining English and Russian motifs.[28] The poem is most notable, though, for being composed in sixty-three inverse *Onegin* stanzas; that is, each of the fourteen stanzas rhymes AAbCCbDDeeFgFg and not AbAbCCddEffEgg. The device seems a bit too clever, but it certainly calls forth the desired comparison with *Eugene Onegin*, and also is in keeping with Nabokov's long-standing interest in this form, ranging from his early "To a Poet," whose fourteen lines begin precisely like an *Onegin* stanza but invert the last six (AbAbCCddEEfGGf), and continuing of course through his own translation of the novel.

"The Night Journey" is the one non-autobiographical poem in the group. "(Vivian Calmbrood's 'The Night Journey')" appears beneath the title in English, implying that the poem is a translation. However, Vivian Calmbrood is one of the anagrams of Vladimir Nabokov that appear now and then in his works. Nabokov uses this ruse to disguise an attack on the émigré poet Georgy Ivanov, who appears here as Johnson, the English equivalent of Ivanov's surname, and who in a review of several items by Nabokov had written that his prose works were banal and lacked virtuosity, while the poems (in *The Return of Chorb*), were "simply banal."[29] "The Night Journey," which consists largely of a dialogue that embodies Nabokov's poetic credo, also contains a direct attack on another of his literary opponents, the critic Georgy Adamovich. "The Parisian Poem," like some of the earlier long works, looks back over an immediately preceding period in Nabokov's life, in this case his time in Paris at the end of the 1930s, when he found himself amidst the "Russian Parnassus"—the circle of émigré poets who had settled in France—and the same figures he had attacked in "The Night Journey."

"Fame," composed a year earlier and described by one critic as "perhaps his finest piece of Russian verse,"[30] is an autobiographical version of "The Night Journey," in that it again consists of a dialogue and deals with the nature of art; here, though, one speaker is the lyrical "I" and the other an imaginary double. The observations are more fragmentary and obscure, with Nabokov almost teasing the reader: "Eta taina ta-ta, ta-ta-ta-ta, ta-ta, / a tochnee skazat' ia ne vprave." ("That main secret tra-tá-ta tra-tá-ta tra-tá— / And I must not be overly explicit") (tr. Nabokov). The flippant tone masks Nabokov's serious point: the underlying theme is less memory than the broader category of perception. The vagueness of the I's interlocutor and the desire not to speak directly about the "secret" recall Tiutchev's famous line from the poem "Silentium" (1829?), "An uttered thought is a lie." The other world has to be sensed more than described; poetry at its best manages to convey a knowledge of the ineffable.

Nabokov's verse is not confined to the works published separately as poems. Several of his dramas are written in verse, primarily in unrhymed iambic pentameter, which in Russian as in English is the chief verse form for drama; Skital'tsy (*The Wanderers*) is in freely rhymed iambic pentameter. Of special note are the poems that are inserted here and there in the majority of Nabokov's novels. "Being in Love" has already been discussed, but the work which most would recall in this regard is, of course, "Pale Fire," the 999–line poem that follows the "Foreword" to the novel of that name. Considered separately as a poem, the work is striking for its relatively old-fashioned sound; the rhymed couplets and the regular iambic pentameter are reminiscent of Pope, who is mentioned at one point. In some ways the modern setting seems to be out of keeping with the form, yet it has to be admitted that Nabokov shows great skill in maintaining the tone over the full length of the poem and employing a reasonable amount of poetic imagery while explicating several key themes for the novel as a whole. Less obvious, perhaps, are the poetic inserts that occur in many of the other novels. In *Lolita* Humbert Humbert, a self-confessed poet *manqué*, gives some examples of his verse (cf. pp. 16, 255–57, 263, 299–300); the last instance, an unabashed takeoff on T.S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday," is cited by Quilty as "a fine poem. Your best as far as I am concerned" (300). The poetry clearly has a purpose within the novel—Humbert's imitative verse illustrates his poverty of imagination—but it also again shows Nabokov's disdain for English (as well as for Russian) experiments with modern verse forms, to say nothing of highlighting his ability to create poetic parodies in his adopted language.

The novel in which poetry plays the most prominent role is *The Gift*. The chief figure, Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev, resembles Nabokov in many ways, not the least of which is his own movement from poetry to prose; as another character says to Fyodor, his poems "are but the models of your future novels." The first chapter contains entire works from what is supposed to be his first collection of poetry, and other poems are scattered throughout, including one, "Lastochka" ("The Swallow") that Nabokov later cited as his favorite among all his Russian poems (*SO* 14). Long passages are given over to the analysis of poetry (especially in chapter one), to questions of poetic influence, to descriptions of the poetic process (cf. the section on the poem "Blagodariu tebia, otchizna . . ." ["Thank you, my land . . ."][31] and to the development of a youthful poet (especially the beginning of chapter three). The novel ends, appropriately enough, with a paragraph written out as though it were prose but consisting of an *Onegin* stanza. That Nabokov regarded the poetry in *The Gift* as an independent accomplishment is evidenced by his decision to include it in *Stikhi*, which was meant to be the definitive edition of his verse, where it occupies more than a dozen pages.

The poetry in many of his novels, including *Lolita* and *The Gift*, was translated by Nabokov himself. *Lolita* is of particular interest, since it is one of the few instances when Nabokov felt called upon to translate from English into

his native Russian, though he also translated some fragments from *Hamlet* along with a couple of Shakespeare's sonnets.[32] (Nabokov's other translations into Russian included at least one work from German, the dedication to Goethe's *Faust*, but were mostly from French: poems by Pierre de Ronsard, Alfred de Musset, Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud.[33]) The Russian version of the T.S. Eliot imitation that Humbert recites to Quilty captures the sense, the tone, and the form of the English, even moving from the free verse of the opening lines toward a generally iambic rhythm as it goes on.[34] At other times, as in the little quatrain that Humbert composes to amuse Rita, major changes in the meaning are required in order to maintain the form: "The place was called *Enchanted Hunters*. Query: / What Indian dyes, Diana, did thy dell / endorse to make of Picture Lake a very / blood bath of trees before the blue hotel?" (*Lo* 263); "Palitra klenov v ozere, kak rana, / Otrazhena. Vedet ikh na uboi / V bagrianom odeianii Diana / Pered gostinitseiu goluboi."[35] Both passages are in rhymed (AbAb) iambic pentameter, but the Russian is hardly a literal translation of the English.

An effort to retain the formal features of the original frequently occurs as well in Nabokov's translations from Russian into English. In the preface to *Poems and Problems* (14) he declares that "whenever possible, I have welcomed rhyme, or its shadow, but I have never twisted the tail of a line for the sake of consonance; and the original measure has not been kept if readjustments had to be made for its sake." In fact, his approach within that collection varies. At times, as in his translation of "Provans" ("Provence"), he maintains throughout both the rhyme and the meter of the original and even makes a conscious effort to create alliteration in roughly the same places. At others, as when rendering "Tikhii shum" ("Soft Sound"), he ignores rhyme and only intermittently maintains the meter of the Russian. A middle way, as in "K Rossii" ("To Russia") is to change the AbAb rhyme scheme so that only the even lines are regularly rhymed but to maintain the meter. What is true is that both here and, for instance, in the translations that he did for *The Gift*, he clearly makes great efforts to maintain the sense of the original, even if it must come at the expense of a certain smoothness or elegance in the English.

In the final analysis it is difficult to place Nabokov's poetry within the Russian literary tradition, and not just because of his bilingualism. Nabokov admired Bunin's poetry, which he preferred to the better-known prose, as well as the verse of Khodasevich (*SM* 285); both, like Nabokov himself, were conservative in their approach to verse form and had relatively little connection to the leading poetic schools of their day. Critics have often cited these poets as important for Nabokov, and yet, beyond sharing an aversion to modernist tendencies in poetry, any thematic connection to either appears only intermittently. In the second of two poems on the death of Aleksandr Blok, Nabokov three times lists the four poets whom he sees as Blok's precursors—Pushkin, Lermontov, Tiutchev, and Fet (*Groza*' 20–21). To some degree all influenced Nabokov as well; in particular, Pushkin pervades Nabokov's work (and not just

the poetry) in numerous ways,[36] and Tiutchev's philosophical strain is echoed in much of the verse. However, many poets were affected by these leading figures of the nineteenth century; the true problem lies in elucidating the relationship between Nabokov's poetry and that of his contemporaries. His frequently announced dislike of modern experimental poetry comes out in parodies: "O praviteliakh" ("On Rulers," 1944; *Stikhi* 276–77) imitates Maiakovsky's rhymes as well as his use of lines that vary greatly in length, and "Iosif Krasnyi, —*ne* Iosif . . ." ("Joseph the Red—*not* Joseph . . . ," 1937; *Stikhi* 257) plays on Tsvetaeva's frequent use of dashes, exclamation marks, and startling enjambement. His attitude toward Pasternak, particularly after the publication of *Doctor Zhivago*, also is negative: note the imitation of Pasternak in "Kakoe ia sdelal durnoe delo . . ." ("What Is the Evil Deed . . . ," 1959; *Stikhi* 292) and "Pasternak" (1970; *Stikhi* 296), with yet another comparison of Pasternak and Benediktov. On the other hand, one critic has asserted that Nabokov is "the only authentic émigré poet who has studied Pasternak and learned something from him" and that some of the early poems show the same rush of imagery, the same virtuosity in the use of sounds and words, that characterize Pasternak.[37] Veerheul has in fact suggested that Nabokov's gibes at Pasternak represent an attempt to free himself from the latter's influence.[38]

Nabokov's relationship to Blok seems equally ambiguous. On the one hand, he wrote verses on Blok's death and composed several poems that seem to be heavily under his influence: cf. two consecutive poems in *Stikhi*, pp. 106–109, "Vstrecha" ("Meeting," 1923), with an epilogue from Blok, and "Pesnia" ("A Song," 1923), modeled on Blok's "Devushka pela v tserkovnom khore . . ." ("A girl was singing in the church choir . . ."). [39] A later poem, "L'Inconnue de la Seine" (1934; *Stikhi* 254–55) shows the possible influence of "Neznakomka" ("The Stranger"). [40] Yet Nabokov's own verse ultimately lacks both the musical quality and the profoundly Symbolist vision of Blok; Nabokov's concept of the "other world" tends to be more varied, its relation to the everyday world flexible—the two worlds mirror each other, one is not necessarily higher or more desirable than the other. Nabokov reacted against Blok's late acceptance of the Revolution; his long unpublished poem "Dvoe" ("The Two") is a direct response and counter to "The Twelve."[41] Furthermore, his critical judgments on Blok vary considerably and would indicate at best a divided set of feelings.[42]

The most fruitful comparison may well be to Gumilev, a poet to whom Nabokov addressed a couple of short poems: "Pamiati Gumileva" ("In Memory of Gumilev," 1923; *Stikhi* 95) and "Kak liubil ia stikhi Gumileva!" ("How I loved Gumilev's poems!" 1972; *Stikhi* 297). His direct comments on Gumilev are enthusiastic: "One cannot speak about Gumilev without being excited. There will come a time when Russia will be proud of him. When reading him you understand, among other things, that a poem cannot simply be a 'construct' a 'lyrical something,' an assortment of chance images, a fog, a blind alley. A poem must be above all interesting."[43] Nabokov uses titles found in Gumilev on several occasions ("U kamina" ["By the Hearth"], "Palomnik"

["The Pilgrim"]) and wrote some poems dealing with legends and knighthood in the manner of Gumilev: "La Morte d'Arthur," "Tristan."[44] More fundamentally, while both learned from Symbolism, they share a reaction against it and a turn toward a different kind of metaphysical poetry as their careers progress.[45]

Still, all these figures are greater poets than Nabokov. Struve's original judgment still holds:[46] Nabokov, unlike, say, Mandelshtam or Pasternak, is not a poet who happened to write prose but a prose writer who happened to write verse. On several occasions Nabokov has been compared to Joyce; both were innovative, major prose writers who were conservative, minor poets.[47] Yet, while Joyce virtually abandoned verse, Nabokov continued to write it until the end of his career, significantly using a poem ("Softest of Tongues") to announce his decision that he would abandon Russian and switch to English. Forcing himself to "start anew with clumsy tools of stone," as he concludes that poem, he nonetheless goes on to create English poems that display "a peculiar miniature excellence: perfect lucidity, precise wit, the glow of a lighted candle cupped in an expert hand against the windy verse roundabout."[48] It is not that he was a better poet in English than in Russian, but that his English poetry nearly all dates from his more mature period, when he wrote less but had found his own voice as a poet. Nabokov's poetic talent, beyond the formal virtuosity, comes out largely through his evocative descriptions, his gift for parody, and the imaginative situations, which often veer on to the surreal and the grotesque. After the mid-1920s fewer of his poems seem to be direct borrowings from his predecessors, and instead he uses the poetry to test and hone the themes and devices that he simultaneously develops in his prose. Works such as "Fame" and "An Evening of Russian Poetry" are indeed minor yet enduring achievements. That these and many of his other finest poems contain a strong narrative line and a "voice" not dissimilar to that of his stories simply confirms once again that his true inclinations as an artist were ultimately toward prose.

Barry P. Scherr

Notes

1. For a full catalogue of the known reviews, see Boyd, "Émigré Responses to Nabokov (I): 1921–1930," *The Nabokovian*, no. 17 (Fall 1986), 21–41; "Émigré Responses to Nabokov (II): 1931–1935," *The Nabokovian*, no. 18 (Spring 1987), 34–53; "Émigré Responses to Nabokov (III): 1936–1939," *The Nabokovian*, no. 19 (Fall 1987), 23–38; and "Émigré Responses to Nabokov (IV): 1940–1984," *The Nabokovian*, no. 20 (Spring 1988), 56–66.
2. [Editor's note: see "*Notes on Prosody*" in this volume.]
3. Review of *Vozvrashchenie Chorba*, *Volia Rossii*, no. 2 (Feb. 1930), p. 191; quoted in Timenchik, p. 96.
4. Struve, 1956, p. 167; see, e.g., Timenchik, p. 99.

5. Soloukhin, p. 16.
6. Field, 1986, p. 127.
7. Boyd, 1990, p. 142 et passim; "Nabokov's Russian Poems," p. 13.
8. Johnson, 1991, p. 314.
9. Timenchik, p. 100.
10. Johnson, 1991, pp. 312–13.
11. The early published verse is now accessible in *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy Poems and Narrative Poems*, which contains all the poetry in *The Empyrean Path*, *The Cluster*, *The Return of Chorb*, and *Poems and Problems* Russian texts only, along with much of the uncollected verse that was not included in the 1979 volume.
12. Cf. the comparison between writing and composing chess problems in *Speak, Memory*, p. 290.
13. G.S. Smith, 1991, pp. 272–74.
14. Ibid., p. 302.
15. Ibid., p. 286.
16. Ibid., pp. 294–95.
17. *The New Yorker*, 24 October 1942, p. 26.
18. Rabaté, pp. 397–98.
19. Ibid., p. 401.
20. See, for instance, Setschkareff (pp. 71–82) and Connolly "The Otherworldly."
21. Connolly, "The Otherworldly," p. 390.
22. Cf. Boyd, 1991, p. 305.
23. Rampton, 1991, p. 353.
24. Smirnov, p. 11.
25. Fedorov, pp. 13–14.
26. For more on the theme of angels, see Tolstaia.
27. For detailed discussions of these last five poems, see Field, 1967, ch. 4.
28. Aikhenval'd, 1928, pp. 2–3.
29. G. Ivanov, p. 234.
30. Boyd, 1991, p. 41.
31. Lotman, pp. 47–48.
32. *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, pp. 498–503.
33. Ibid., pp. 504–23.
34. Russian *Lolita*, pp. 278–79.
35. Ibid., p. 243.
36. Cf. Naumann, 1991. [Editor's note: see "Nabokov and Pushkin" in this volume.]
37. Adamovich, 1975, pp. 227–29.
38. Veerheul, p. 139.
39. For more detailed comments regarding Blok's influence on Nabokov's poetry (and prose) see Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 215–17; cf. also Rabaté, p. 410.
40. Johnson, 1992, p. 232.
41. Boyd, 1990, pp. 156–57.
42. Timenchik, p. 96.
43. Ibid., p. 99. From a review by Nabokov of several poetry collections in *Rul'*, 11 May 1927.
44. Chudinova, pp. 28–29.
45. For a discussion of the extent to which Gumilev's persona as well as his poetry were important for Nabokov, see Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 223–27; Tammi (1992) notes

further an echo from a poem by Gumilev in *Glory*.
46. Struve, 1956, p. 170.
47. Diment; Dupee, p. 127.
48. Dupee, p. 133.

POLITICS

Nabokov's political views were remarkably consistent, differing little from youth to old age. He had a deep political philosophy, on which he rarely acted; when he did act, it was in a highly personal manner. It was woven from two strands that seem antithetical: a profound acceptance of the views of his articulate and politically active father, and an equally profound individualism that prevented Nabokov from joining any group—especially one of a political nature. Indeed, at the Tenishev School these views did come into conflict: "even then I was intensely averse to joining movements or associations of any kind. . . . The constant pressure upon me to belong to some group or other never broke my resistance but led to a state of tension that was hardly alleviated by everybody harping upon the example set by my father" (*SM* 186). This conflict was probably seminal in developing Nabokov's creed of extreme individualism. He placed this description of his problems at school in the middle of a chapter of his autobiography that was primarily devoted to his exemplary father, Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov, member of the liberal Kadet party (the Constitutional Democrats) and of the Duma (the constitutional assembly established under Tsar Nicholas II, with whom it was in constant conflict), journalist, minister in the Provisional Government (the moderate ruling body after the Revolution of February 1917, overthrown by the Bolsheviks in October), in Nabokov's words "jurist, publicist and statesman." V.D. Nabokov's attempts to further democracy, eradicate official anti-Semitism, install trial by jury, decriminalize homosexuality, abolish the death penalty, and especially, protect the rights of individuals, all became Nabokov's heritage.

The only issue that brought the two strands of his political philosophy together was Soviet communism: Bolshevism had destroyed the Russian democratic movement to which his father had been committed, while Nabokov was also deeply opposed to the whole idea of Marxism because of its emphasis on collective rather than individual values. Brian Boyd noted that "throughout Nabokov's life only one political issue ever excited him: the attitude those outside the country should take toward the Soviet Union."[1] One example of Nabokov's few overt political actions could serve as a paradigm: while a student at Cambridge he engaged in a political debate. The debate was an individual rather than group political action; the topic was Bolshevism, toward which he

of course took an opposing view; and instead of writing his own speech, he memorized a speech by his father (*SM* 179).[2]

As a writer, Nabokov believed that art should be above politics, an attitude shared by, among others, James Joyce. In spite of this, anti-communist politics at the philosophical level were among the concerns of Nabokov's novels during the period girdling the second world war. *Despair*'s murderous narrator/protagonist dreams of a sur-communist world where every man resembles every other yet kills the one person he believes looks like himself. *Invitation to a Beheading* takes place in a future Russia where even individual thought is outlawed. *The Gift*'s fourth chapter, a biography of Chernyshevsky, finds that the weeds of Soviet propaganda art have their muddy roots in the politically motivated, radical utilitarian writers of nineteenth-century Russia, and it is not really a paradox that this attack on political writers is itself deeply political; George Orwell noted (in "Why I Write") that for authors, "the opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude." *Bend Sinister* portrays the plight of a philosopher caught in the net of a tyrant, whose state is a mixture of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. During this period, only one novel, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, exists in a non-politicized world, while the rest of Nabokov's career—on both sides of this period—keeps these concerns to a minimum.

Extremist politics had, of course, devoted more of its cruel attention to Nabokov than he to it: Bolsheviks robbed him of his homeland, Russian monarchists assassinated his father, and Nazi Germany killed his brother in a concentration camp. During his years in Berlin, Nabokov's lack of interest in local political concerns reached perilous levels, and his delay in removing himself, his son, and his Jewish wife from Nazi Germany seems today to show extraordinary naïveté—although Véra was apparently even more reluctant to take action than Nabokov himself.

Once in America, Nabokov had a new homeland with which to identify. He became an American citizen and a patriot, but even after he had the leverage of fame, his patriotic acts were private gestures, such as sending a telegram to Lyndon Johnson after the President's surgery, "wishing you a perfect recovery and a speedy return to the admirable work you are accomplishing" (*SL* 378). Nabokov's patriotism is found not in his novels but in his interviews: "Crude criticism of American affairs offends and distresses me. In home politics I am strongly anti-segregationist. In foreign policy, I am definitely on the government's side. And when in doubt, I always follow the simple method of choosing that line of conduct which may be the most displeasing to the Reds and the Russells" (*SO* 98). In America Nabokov continued to be an extreme individualist. His friend Morris Bishop noted that "he had small interest in politics, none in society's economic concerns. He cared nothing for problems of low-cost housing, school consolidation, bond issues for sewage-treatment plants."[3] However, in 1945 in an angry letter to a local pastor he refused permission for Dmitri to participate in a clothing drive

for Germany (*SL* 63). He never attended a faculty meeting, but he was once individually active in preventing the expulsion from Cornell of several students accused of obscenity charges involving a story published in a campus magazine.[4]

Although he disliked Joseph McCarthy's methods, Nabokov believed that Soviet-directed communist infiltration of American institutions was considerable. His own experience had included such events as the discovery of a Bolshevik spy in his father's Petersburg household, which helps explain some of his unjustified suspicions later, including his snubbing of Marc Slonim in 1945 because of an incorrect belief that Slonim was in the pay of the Soviets; his growing conviction that Roman Jakobson was a Soviet agent; and his belief that the smuggling of the *Doctor Zhivago* manuscript out of the U.S.S.R. for foreign publication was a Soviet hoax.[5]

After he moved to Switzerland, his celebrity status did not change his individualist methods. His continuing interest in Russian writers led to several private actions even when he refused public ones; thus he wrote privately to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, welcoming him to Europe, but two weeks later declined to write a public letter to the same purpose for the *New York Times Book Review*. He wrote a letter to *The Observer* protesting the treatment of Soviet dissident writer Vladimir Bukovsky; while declining to sign a group letter in the similar case of Vladimir Maramzin, he sent his own telegram of protest to the Writers Union in Leningrad (*SL* 527–29, 531, 541, 540).

Nabokov once identified his politics in the following way: "My father was an old-fashioned liberal, and I do not mind being labeled an old-fashioned liberal too" (*SO* 96). In modern American terms, he would be labeled a conservative, and his friendship with William F. Buckley, while not itself political, is reasonably indicative of his position on the modern spectrum. He explained his firm belief in democracy as being based on his concern for individuality: "The splendid paradox of democracy is that while stress is laid on the rule of all and equality of common rights, it is the individual that derives from it his special and uncommon benefit. Ethically, the members of a democracy are equals; spiritually, each has the right to be as different from his neighbors as he pleases; and taken all in all, it is not perhaps an organization or a government or a community that we really have in mind when we say "democracy" but the subtle balance between the boundless privileges of every individual and the strictly equal rights of all men. Life is a state of harmony—and that is why I think that the spirit of democracy is the most natural human condition. . . . Democracy is humanity at its best, not because we happen to think that a republic is better than a king and a king is better than nothing and nothing is better than a dictator, but because it is the natural condition of every man ever since the human mind became conscious not only of the world but of itself. Morally, democracy is invincible."[6] In that statement as well as others, Nabokov's democratic stance was tolerant of different political systems, provided that they included a belief in the rights of individuals: "I do not mix

with 'black-hundred' White Russians and do not mix with the so-called 'bolshevizans,' that is 'pinks.' On the other hand, I have friends among intellectual Constitutional Monarchists as well as among intellectual Social Revolutionaries" (*SO* 96). And therefore I have saved for a closing quotation what I consider his clearest statement of his politics, one that is itself strikingly tolerant: "Since my youth—I was 19 when I left Russia—my political creed has remained as bleak and changeless as an old gray rock. It is classical to the point of triteness. Freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of art. The social or economic structure of the ideal state is of little concern to me. My desires are modest. Portraits of the head of the government should not exceed a postage stamp in size. No torture and no executions. No music, except coming through earphones, or played in theaters" (*SO* 34–35).

Charles Nicol

NOTES

1. Boyd, 1991, p. 84.
2. Boyd, 1990, pp. 168–69. Boyd notes that this debate was held on November 28, 1919; Nabokov had described it as taking place the following spring and as his only political speech. Boyd does not mention one problem: Nabokov precisely dated the speech that he claimed to have borrowed as having been given by his father on January 16, 1920 and published the following week, two months too late to have been of use in November.
3. Bishop, p. 237.
4. Boyd, 1991, p. 256.
5. Ibid., pp. 85, 311, 372.
6. "What Faith Means to a Resisting People," p. 212.

"POSHLOST'"

"Poshlost'" (or "poshlust" in Nabokov's punning transcription; he also transliterated it "poshlost") is a Russian word that Nabokov introduced into the English language. It refers to the broad range of cultural, social, and political phenomena under the category of "inferior taste."[1] Nabokov elaborates on the concept in his book *Nikolai Gogol* (1944): "The Russian language is able to express by means of one pitiless word the idea of a certain widespread defect for which the other . . . languages I happen to know possess no special term. . . . English words expressing several, although by no means all aspects of *poshlust* are for instance: 'cheap, sham, common, smutty, pink-and-blue, high falutin', in bad taste, . . . inferior, sorry, trashy, scurvy, tawdry, gimcrack' and others under 'cheapness.' All these however suggest merely certain false

values for the detection of which no particular shrewdness is required. . . . [B]ut what Russians call *poshlust* is beautifully timeless and so cleverly painted all over with protective tints that its presence (in a book, in a soul, in an institution, in a thousand other places) often escapes detection" (*NG* 63–4).

In his 1950 lecture on "Philistines and Philistinism" (*LRL* 309–314), Nabokov expanded the concept with additional features. "Poshlust" or "poshlism" is the mental essence that emanates from a "smug philistine," a "dignified vulgarian," a "bourgeois" (in a Flaubertian, not a Marxist sense—for it reflects "a state of mind, not a state of pocket" [*LRL* 309]). "Poshlust" always presupposes the veneer of civilization, but the values enjoyed by the philistine as genuine are by implication a fraud. Manifestations of "poshlust" range from petty to cosmic: they include the harmless kitsch and make-believe of advertisement, the banality of mass culture, the automatic exchange of platitudes, trends, and fads in social and cultural life, bogus profundities, pseudo-"great books," hackneyed literary criticism, political propaganda, totalitarian forms of government, organized cults and anthropomorphic notions of the "beyond," and much more. For example, shoddy thinking such as comparing Senator McCarthy to Stalin or Hitler, and concluding that "America is no better than Russia" or that "We all share in Germany's guilt" is "poshlust." "Listing in one breath Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and Vietnam is seditious *poshlost*. Belonging to a very select club (which sports *one* Jewish name—that of the treasurer) is genteel *poshlost*" (*SO* 101).

Nabokov treats "poshlust" with lofty disdain and impish mockery. It should be understood, however, that when he attaches this "deadly label" to something, it is an act of aesthetic judgment as well as a moral indictment. To expose and exorcise "the demons of *poshlust*" (*NG* 69) in their various disguises is not the pursuit of a *bête noire* by a cranky pundit—it constitutes an essential part of Nabokov's aesthetic and ethical mission.

As a state of mind, "poshlust" knows neither class nor national boundaries. "An English duke can be as much of a philistine as an American Shriner or a French bureaucrat or a Soviet citizen" (*LRL* 310). The epitome of "poshlust" for Nabokov was Soviet Russia, "a country of moral imbeciles, of smiling slaves and poker-faced bullies" where, thanks to its special "blend of despotism and pseudo-culture" (*LRL* 313), the ability to discern "poshlust" all but atrophied. But to the Russians of Gogol's, Tolstoy's, or Chekhov's time and culture it was Germany that had always seemed "a country where *poshlust*, instead of being mocked, was one of the essential parts of the national spirit, habits, traditions and general atmosphere, although at the same time well-meaning Russian intellectuals of a more romantic type readily, too readily, adopted the legend of the greatness of German philosophy and literature; for it takes a super-Russian to admit that there is a dreadful streak of *poshlust* running through Goethe's *Faust*" (*NG* 64). Nabokov, who in his early novels frequently mocked the German brand of "poshlust," is aware that "To exaggerate the worthlessness of a country at the awkward moment when one is at war with it [the year

was 1944]—and would like to see it destroyed to the last beer-mug and last forget-me-not,—means walking dangerously close to that abyss of *poshlust* which yawns so universally at times of revolution or war" (*NG* 65).

However, the prime domain of "poshlust" is art and literature. Here Nabokov focuses on cases "when the sham is *not* obvious and when the values it mimics are considered, rightly or wrongly, to belong to the very highest level of art, thought or emotion . . . *poshlust* is not only the obviously trashy but also the falsely important, the falsely beautiful, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive" (*NG* 68, 70). Yet, Nabokov finds it often difficult to explain why exactly an acclaimed work of literature, full of noble emotion, compassion and best intentions "is far, far worse than the kind of literature which *everybody* admits is cheap" (*NG* 70): "The trouble is that sincerity, honesty and even true kindness of heart cannot prevent the demon of *poshlust* from possessing himself of an author's typewriter when the man lacks genius and when the 'reading public' is what publishers think it is" (*NG* 69). Among the symptoms that signal the presence of "poshlust" in a work of art, Nabokov lists "Freudian symbolism, moth-eaten mythologies, social comment, humanistic messages, political allegories, overconcern with class or race, . . . case histories of minority groups, sorrows of homosexuals . . ." (*SO* 101, 116). The philistine lives under the delusion that "a book, to be great, must deal in great ideas" (*SO* 41). For Nabokov any form of didacticism, moralism, utilitarianism, or anything that compromises the aesthetic purity of a work of art belongs to the realm of "poshlust."

Some insight into the more consummate aspects of "poshlust" can be gained from the list of acclaimed authors or works that Nabokov reviles. A random sampling that I have compiled from his *Strong Opinions* includes the four doctors—Dr. Freud, Dr. Zhivago, Dr. Schweitzer, and Dr. Castro (115), Sir Bertrand Russell, the peace activist (98), the "awful Monsieur Camus and even more awful Monsieur Sartre" (175), Mann's "Death in Venice" (101), the "execrable" D. H. Lawrence (135), the book for boys about "bells, balls, and bulls" by Hemingway (but Nabokov loved "The Killers" and his "wonderful fish story," and considered Hemingway better than Conrad [80]).

Among great Russian writers Nabokov "dislikes intensely *The Karamazov Brothers* and the ghastly *Crime and Punishment* rigmarole" with its "sensitive murderers, soulful prostitutes," and murky mysticism (*SO* 148, 42); yet he considers *The Double* Dostoevsky's best work (84). He detests Tolstoy's *Resurrection* and "The Kreuzer Sonata," but considers *Anna Karenina* and "The Death of Ivan Ilych" to be masterpieces of nineteenth-century literature (*SO* 147). Nabokov loves Gogol's *Petersburg Tales*, his plays, and *Dead Souls*, but loaths his folklorism, "moralistic slant," "utter inability to describe young women," and his "obsession with religion" (*SO* 156). In his adolescence, Nabokov relished the works of Wells, Poe, Browning, Keats, Flaubert, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Chekhov, Tolstoy, and Blok. Between the ages of 20 and 40 his favorites were Housman, Rupert Brooke, Norman Douglas, Bergson,

Joyce, Proust, Shakespeare and Pushkin (*SO* 42–43). Poe and Brooke later lost their thrill, but Shakespeare and Pushkin remain for Nabokov the two greatest literary geniuses. Nabokov singled out Joyce's *Ulysses*, Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Bely's *Petersburg*, and the first half of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (*SO* 57, 85), in that order, as the greatest achievements of twentieth-century prose. But he dismisses *Finnegans Wake* as "a formless and dull mass of phony folklore" (*SO* 71).

In his book on Gogol, Nabokov compiles from among the characters of European fiction a list of typical perpetrators of "poshlust." We find here Polonius and the royal pair in *Hamlet*, Rodolphe and Homais from *Madame Bovary*, Laevsky from Chekhov's "The Duel," Joyce's Marion Bloom, young Bloch in *Search of Lost Time*, Maupassant's "Bel Ami," Anna Karenina's husband, and Berg in *War and Peace* (*NG* 70). An analogous list can be made up of characters from Nabokov's own works. I would include here Luzhin's impresario Valentinov (the evil variant of "poshlust") and Luzhin's in-laws (the harmless variant) in the novel *The Defense*; Hermann and his act of murder conceived as a work of art in *Despair*; M'sieur Pierre and the "art" of execution in *Invitation to a Beheading*; N.G. Chernyshevski, as a literary character in chapter 4 of *The Gift*, and Zina's stepfather Shchyogolev; the dictator Paduk from *Bend Sinister*; the biographer Goodman in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*; Lolita's mother and Clare Quilty in *Lolita*, to name only the major ones.

It is not mere coincidence that Nabokov first elaborates the notion of "poshlust" in his book on Gogol, the greatest master in Russian literature of depicting and mocking this vice. Nabokov guides the reader through a gallery of Gogol's "poshliaki" and "poshliachki" (male and female perpetrators of "poshlust"), pauses before the more exquisite cases of "poshlust," and comments on the "gusto and wealth of weird detail" with which Gogol paints these "sleek, plump, smooth, and glossy" creatures (*NG* 71). However, even this most Gogolian category owes something to Pushkin. Reflecting on the reception of *Dead Souls*, Gogol wrote: "[Critics] discussed my case a lot. They analyzed various of my facets, but failed to identify my main essence. Only Pushkin discerned it. He used to say to me that no other writer before me possessed the gift to expose so brightly life's *poshlust*, to depict so powerfully the *poshlust* of a *poshlusty* man [poshlost' poshlogo cheloveka] in such a way that everybody's eyes would be opened wide to all the petty trivia that often escape our attention. This is my main quality, it belongs exclusively to me, and is lacking in other writers" ("The Third Letter à propos *Dead Souls*," 1843).[2] If Gogol's statement can be trusted, it would be fair to say that Nabokov in his interpretation of Gogol views his subject through Pushkin's eyes. Of all Russian writers it was Pushkin's artistic and moral code that Nabokov made into his own, and whose explicit and implicit presence permeates most of Nabokov's literary and critical works (see "Nabokov and Pushkin" in this volume).

The elusive concept of "poshlust" deserves one last gloss with regard to the cultural background that shaped Nabokov's values and contributed to such a low tolerance for anything that did not meet his high standards. The anglophile Nabokov family descended from ancient Russian nobility of colossal cultural and material wealth. In addition to several million rubles and a two-thousand acre estate, which were to be lost in 1917, the firstborn Vladimir inherited even greater wealth: "the beauty of intangible property, the unreal estate" (*SM* 40) of future memories of a perfect boyhood, spent in Russia's "most fantastic city," St. Petersburg, and amidst the luxury of Northern fauna and flora at the country estate in Vyra. Surrounded by books and butterflies (he became an expert entomologist before he was ten), loving parents, and experiencing his first love affair, Nabokov developed a lifelong passion for everything precious and passing. Brought up by private tutors to speak French, English, and Russian, he had read by the time he was fifteen more of the great works in his three languages than most native speakers of them read in a lifetime.

Fate, too, was generous to Nabokov. He was born on Shakespeare's birthday (April 23) in the last year of the last century, which marked the centennial of Pushkin's birth. The first two decades of this century, known in the history of Russian culture as the Silver Age, have seen the best Russian poetry since Pushkin's Golden Age (Blok, Bely, Bal'mont, Briusov, Maiakovsky, Khlebnikov, Gumilev, Akhmatova, Mandelshtam, Pasternak, Tsvetaeva, Esenin). During these years Nabokov wrote poem after poem with that "terrifying facility" for lyrical verse that for a Russian of his generation was often "as much a part of adolescence as acne."[3] Later he studied at the private Tenishev Institute, an emphatically liberal and nondiscriminatory school, which produced another celebrated alumnus, Osip Mandelshtam, the greatest Russian poet of the twentieth century. Nabokov was to draw on this wealth for the rest of his life and to distribute it generously among the heroes of his fictions and their readers. The "exorcism" of the "demons of *poshlust*," who threaten to engulf civilization in universal dullness and tedium, constitutes the core of Nabokov's aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical profession of faith. Its values inform most of Nabokov's works and "strong opinions." Let me conclude with one such opinion: "In fact I believe that one day a reappraiser will come and declare that, far from having been a frivolous firebird [an allusion to Nabokov's pen name 'Sirin'], I was a rigid moralist kicking sin, scuffing stupidity, ridiculing the vulgar and cruel—and assigning sovereign power to tenderness, talent, and pride" (*SO* 193).

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NOTES

1. Nabokov discusses "poshlust" in the following texts: *Nikolai Gogol*, pp. 63–74; *Strong Opinions*, pp. 100–101; and the essay, "Philistines and Philistinism," *Lectures on Russian Literature*, pp. 309–14.
2. Gogol, 1959, vol. 6, p. 151.
3. Boyd, 1990, p. 96

THE REAL LIFE OF SEBASTIAN KNIGHT

Throughout his work Vladimir Nabokov has explored the terra incognita beyond the borders of consciousness, to glimpse other worlds ordinarily unperceived.[1] Such diverse characters as Hermann Karlovich in *Despair* and John Shade in *Pale Fire* speculate upon consciousness after death, while Cincinnatus C. in *Invitation to a Beheading* and Art Longwood in "The Ballad of Longwood Glen" enter invisible realms. Others transform themselves to enter the invisible realms of the minds of their fellow characters. Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev in *The Gift* habitually tries "to imagine the inner, transparent motion of this or that other person. He would carefully seat himself inside the interlocutor as in an armchair, so that the other's elbows would serve as armrests for him, and his soul would fit snugly into the other's soul—and then the lighting of the world would suddenly change and for a minute he would actually become Alexander Chernyshevski, or Lyubov Markovna, or Vasiliev" (35–36).

Nabokov's first English novel, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, is a complex elaboration of this metamorphic theme, as the narrator, V., writes a biography of his dead half brother, the novelist Sebastian Knight, relying on memory, interviews, Sebastian's books, and intuitive conjecture. V. concludes "that the soul is but a manner of being—not a constant state—that any soul may be yours, if you find and follow its undulations. The hereafter may be the full ability of consciously living in any chosen soul, in any number of souls, all of them unconscious of their interchangeable burden. Thus—I am Sebastian Knight" (202–203). V.'s book, "beguiling and melancholy," in Moynahan's phrase,[2] is the result of a poignant yearning for communion with an aloof half-brother whom V. says he hardly knew, even when they were boys. Nabokov has reversed the ancient fraternal theme: Cain and Abel, like Oedipus and Jocasta's sons Eteocles and Polynices, become fatally estranged, whereas Sebastian's death brings V. and Sebastian close together at last.

The distant relationship of Sebastian and V. reflects Nabokov's behavior toward his younger brother Sergey, and Sebastian resembles Vladimir in other ways: both are born in 1899, flee Russia as a result of the Revolution, attend Cambridge University, live in Europe, and write brilliant, idiosyncratic

fiction. Nabokov also adapted incidents involving his father, his Uncle Rukavishnikov, and Irina Guadanini, with whom in 1937 Nabokov had an extramarital love affair.[3] Nabokov wrote *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* in Paris during December 1938 and January 1939, in haste to enter it in a literary competition in London by the end of January. It was eventually published by New Directions in New York on 18 December 1941.

In 1954 Nabokov disparaged *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, as Field writes in *Nabokov: His Life in Art* (1967): "It is perhaps the weakest of Nabokov's longer works written after 1931, and in a foreword to the Russian version on his memoirs, *Other Shores*, he refers to the 'unbearable imperfections' he now sees in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*."[4] Both Nabokov's and Field's opinions seem to have prevailed, and this novel is neglected in many studies of Nabokov's fiction. A common assessment is epitomized by Toker's comment that "for all its dazzling brilliance, *Sebastian Knight*—the first of Nabokov's novels written directly in English—seems to have been something of a false start."[5] Some evaluations have been extreme. Maddox deems the novel "a perplexing failure," and Morton considers it "a perilously hollow novel."[6] On the other hand, Clancy considers it "one of the most charming and affecting of Nabokov's novels," and according to Karlinsky, the literary critic Edmund Wilson maintained privately that *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is the best of Nabokov's English books.[7]

There is no consensus as to which imperfections are unbearable, despite illuminating studies. Fromberg offers an excellent overview of the novel's form and central enigmas. Olcott provides a chronology of the action, as well as commenting on patterns of imagery concerning chess, violets, the number 36, water and the "Narcissus theme," and the ostensibly coincidental events. Stuart emphasizes the novel's game and quest elements and compares the similar methods of V.'s biography and the fictitious Mr. Goodman's earlier biography, *The Tragedy of Sebastian Knight.* Grabes (1975) analyzes V.'s methods of biographical research, questionable treatment of sources, and highly subjective interpretations. Bader, Nicol (1967), and Rimmon discuss Sebastian Knight's books in detail, examining their fatidic parallels to characters and events in V.'s quest. Maddox and Morton compare the novel to Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and *Bend Sinister*, respectively, both to the detraction of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight.* Buell provides a useful context in his classification of "observer-hero narrative," and Bruffee elaborates a classification of "elegiac romance." Accepting literally V.'s claim that Sebastian's ghost is present as a guide, W. Rowe adduces images that suggest Sebastian's spectral influence. Alexandrov pursues this premise further and, in the most comprehensive discussion of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, elucidates the metaphysical implications of V.'s final belief in the "ability of consciously living in any chosen soul."[8]

V.'s intense desire to live in Sebastian's soul, his extreme expression of a yearning for fraternal love, is counterpointed by the reader's suspicion that V.

may not be related to Sebastian at all.[9] As the novel's narrator, V. seems reliable because he is generally consistent and apparently modest, but we observe little interaction between the putative half-brothers. V.'s account of their boyhood together is meager. His dying mother is his source for the longest anecdote of Sebastian's youth, his journey with Alexis and Larissa Pan, when V. happens to be vacationing in the Crimea. Curiously, in referring to his and Sebastian's father, V. usually writes, "my father." As adults, according to V., the half-brothers meet only four times. Not even other characters in the novel would be likely to find evidence to verify V.'s version, and they seem merely to accept his word that Sebastian was his half-brother. Sebastian's lover Clare Bishop, whom V. for dubious reasons decides not to interview, dies a few months after Sebastian's death, and the suspected femme fatale Madame Lecerf, if she indeed knew Sebastian, seems indifferent to any question of his family.

The possibility that V. may not be related to Sebastian is signaled early, with regard to Mr. Goodman, who served as Sebastian's occasional secretary from 1930 to 1934 and who finished writing his biography, *The Tragedy of Sebastian Knight,* within six weeks of Sebastian's death in January 1936. V., in his first chapter, claims that Sebastian's father married again after divorcing Sebastian's mother, and V. adds, "Oddly enough, this second marriage is not mentioned at all in Mr. Goodman's *Tragedy of Sebastian Knight* . . . ; so that to readers of Goodman's book I am bound to appear non-existent—a bogus relative, a garrulous imposter" (4). And when V. introduces himself as Sebastian's half-brother, Mr. Goodman seems taken aback, because it is too late for him to correct this omission in his forthcoming biography.

Perhaps V. first wished to attach himself to Sebastian's fame in 1935 at the time of the publication of Sebastian's last book, *The Doubtful Asphodel,* when V. was struggling with a tiresome business arrangement and felt, he admits, envy of Sebastian's life. Recounting this incident, V. writes, "I imagined him standing in a warm cheerful room at some club, with his hands in his pockets, his ears glowing, his eyes moist and bright, a smile fluttering on his lips,—and all the other people in the room standing round him, holding glasses of port, and laughing at his jokes" (179). V. immediately acknowledges that this is "a silly picture," but it would be a reasonable notion for someone who had never met Sebastian, whereas it is an implausible assumption for anyone who has actually known Sebastian, who is always depicted as ungregarious. Even as a youth, Sebastian was, according to his classmate Rosanov, "not very popular at school" (138). Perhaps V. has seized on a passage in Sebastian's penultimate book, *Lost Property,* in which the first-person narrator refers to "my small half-brother" (11). Thus V. would be, in the words of John Shade, "a person who deliberately peels off a drab and unhappy past and replaces it with a brilliant invention" (*PF* 238). This possibility that V. is not Sebastian's half-brother can be neither proven nor disproven, and it shimmers in the reader's mind throughout the novel, now brightly, now dimly, enhancing the poignancy of V.'s yearning to live in Sebastian's soul.

Even if V. is "a bogus relative, a garrulous impostor," he may nevertheless be correct in his belief that Sebastian's ghost is guiding him through "his private labyrinth" (181). Of his interview with a Cambridge friend, V. writes, "Sebastian's spirit seemed to hover about us" (43–44), and he claims that Sebastian is "peering unseen" over his shoulder as he writes (50). V. feels "sustained by the secret knowledge that in some unobtrusive way Sebastian's shade is trying to be helpful" (99). In his subjective, intuitive, and dreamlike quest, he is "being led right" (135) as he attunes himself to the "undulations" of Sebastian's soul (202). As Rowe, Boyd and Alexandrov have demonstrated, Nabokov sounds this theme of helpful ghosts throughout his *oeuvre*, most notably in *The Gift*, "The Vane Sisters," *Pale Fire*, and *Transparent Things*.[10]

Besides Sebastian's ghost, characters from his books seem to hover about suggestively. In the course of his biographical research V. meets people who are counterparts of characters in Sebastian's last book, *The Doubtful Asphodel* (listed on p. 173), for example, Sebastian's "Bohemian woman" as V.'s Mademoiselle Bohemsky, Sebastian's prima donna stepping into a puddle as V.'s woman doing the same (168), and Sebastian's "pale wretch noisily . . ." (173) as Pahl Rechnoy, although the paronomastic phrase is V.'s and not necessarily Sebastian's. It is natural that V. should encounter some people whom Sebastian may have adopted as incidental characters in his novel written the previous year, but V.'s lack of acknowledgment of these parallels encourages a fatidic interpretation.

The most prominent of these parallel characters is the detective Mr. Silbermann, who provides crucial assistance in V.'s thwarted search for Sebastian's mysterious mistress, when Mr. Silbermann acquires a list of Sebastian's fellow guests at the Beaumont Hotel in Blauberg in June 1929. Mr. Silbermann's name, his physical appearance, his quaint mannerisms, and his comment that "you can't see de odder side of de moon" (130) summon up remembrance of Sebastian's fictional character in *The Back of the Moon*, the helpful Mr. Siller, "perhaps the most alive of Sebastian's creatures" (102). Whatever the role of Sebastian's spirit in these manifestations, V. appears not to notice the correspondences, despite Mr. Silbermann's bizarre manner in refusing payment and his antic remarks, which burst through the boundaries of a generally realistic novel. It seems implausible that V. should fail to recognize this evidence of Sebastian's rather heavy immaterial hand, and the reader may deduce that V. has slyly inserted Sebastian's characters into his own narrative, perhaps to suggest greater credence for his claims of ghostly guidance.

Sebastian's apparent influence is subtler in the similarity of his visit to Roquebrune and V.'s visit to the St. Damier hospital. At Roquebrune, where Sebastian thinks his mother died years before, he feels her presence in a garden, as he describes in "his most autobiographical work" (4), *Lost Property*: "Gradually I worked myself into such a state that for a moment the pink and green seemed to shimmer and float as if seen through a veil of mist. My mother, a

dim slight figure in a large hat, went slowly up the steps which seemed to dissolve into water" (17–18). Several months later he learns that his mother died at a different Roquebrune. V. falls into a similar confusion at the St. Damier hospital when he feels communion with his half-brother while he sits in vigil outside the room of a patient he has mistaken for Sebastian. Both Sebastian's and V.'s experiences may have involved genuine revenant visitations, given the mobility of ghosts, but the reader must remain uncertain whether V. is aware of the coincidence and even whether V. has fabricated the events at St. Damier.

With this shifting complex of alternative interpretations, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* succeeds as an exquisite ghost story. It also parodies biographies, both in Mr. Goodman's slapdash book encumbered with sociological stereotypes and in V.'s affectionate memoir of homage. Furthermore, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* parodies detective novels, with their series of interviews laden with clues and ironies, as in the oldest of detective stories, *Oedipus Rex*. Sebastian's first novel, *The Prismatic Bezel*, also parodies a whodunit; his second novel, *Success*, parodies the fateful plotting of Nabokov's *The Gift;* his third novel, *Lost Property*, seems to parody fictitious biographies; and his last novel, *The Doubtful Asphodel*, anticipates and parodies the metaphysical speculations of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. As in all his work, Nabokov, like Sebastian Knight, uses "parody as a kind of springboard for leaping into the highest region of serious emotion" (89).

Ghost story, mock biography, and detective novel, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* also has a vaguely picaresque quality, in that although V. pursues a single biographical quest, the episodes seem disconnected, inconclusive, and truncated, especially since V. breaks off any inquiry that elicits an unflattering image of Sebastian. V. himself compares his quest to "Chichikov's round of weird visits in Gogol's 'Dead Souls'" (141), in which Chichikov acquires title to dead serfs in order to represent himself as a man of substance. By this comparison to a fraudulent enterprise, V. casts himself as a roguish picaroon and once again raises the suspicion that he is "a bogus relative." In his next English book, *Nikolai Gogol*, Nabokov refers to "the tremendous dream" of *Dead Souls* and calls *Hamlet* "the wild dream of a neurotic scholar" (107, 140), attracting attention to the dreamlike quality of all his own fiction, including *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, in which V.'s literal dream of Sebastian precedes V.'s ultimate episode and metaphysical revelation. Besides the dream play *Hamlet*, Sebastian keeps on his neatest shelf the most famous dream novel in world literature, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (39).

Nabokov read *Alice in Wonderland* as a boy, and his Russian translation of it was published in 1923. As Lee has written, "the insane and logical voice of Lewis Carroll permeates his works."[11] To interviewers Nabokov said that he considered Carroll "the greatest children's story writer of all time," but he rejected facile comparisons to his own work: "*Alice in Wonderland* is a specific book by a definite author with its own quaintness, its own quirks, its own

quiddity" (*SO* 119, 183). In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, however, Nabokov not only slips *Alice in Wonderland* onto Sebastian's bookshelf but also inspires V. to remark that the manager of the Beaumont Hotel speaks "in the elenctic tones of Lewis Carroll's caterpillar" (121), contributing to the novel's butterfly imagery and theme of metamorphosis.

Curiously, throughout his work most of Nabokov's Carrollian allusions are to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) rather than to its chess-themed sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871). In each novel Alice dreams she is wandering through a strange land inhabited by eccentric creatures. In *Through the Looking-Glass* the principal characters are living chess pieces on a terrain resembling a chessboard, and Alice is assigned the role of a pawn. Despite his lifelong interest in chess, as a player and as a composer of chess problems, Nabokov is oddly silent about this most famous chess novel of all time, although his own chess novel, *The Defense*, echoes scenes from both books about Alice (especially on pp. 100–101 and 141–43), and the chess-master protagonist, Aleksandr Ivanovich Luzhin, eventually perceives himself as a pawn on a huge chessboard.

Although not a chess novel on the order of *The Defense*, nevertheless *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* contains significant references to chess.[12] Sebastian adopts his mother's surname, and by the age of sixteen he is signing his poems with the symbol of a black chess knight (15). Clare Bishop, his lover and amanuensis, is also named for a chess piece. She and the poet P.G. Sheldon play chess (101), and V. interrupts Pahl Rechnoy's chess game with a man V. dubs "Black" (140). Schwarz, whose name means "black" in German, is a chess player in Sebastian's *The Doubtful Asphodel*, and he teaches "an orphan boy the moves of the knight" (173). Furthermore, Sebastian dies in the town of St. Damier, and the word "damier," as V. indicates, is the French term for "chessboard" (195–96). When Edmund Wilson read the prepublication proofs of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, he telephoned Nabokov to ask if the novel were based on a chess game in some way. Perhaps the chess references had reminded Wilson of the erratic sequence of chess moves that Carroll provides to correspond to the action of *Through the Looking-Glass*. In a postscript of a letter to Wilson, Nabokov replied, "You just rang up: no—except for the sketchy chess-game alluded to in one chapter there is *no 'chess-idea' in the development of the whole book*. Sounds attractive, but it is not there" (*NWL* 51, Nabokov's italics).

Nevertheless, in an interview in 1959, to the question "Does each of your books introduce a problem of literary chess to be resolved?" Nabokov answered, "It seems so, doesn't it? It has been a more or less conscious attempt."[13] And in *Speak, Memory* Nabokov adopts chess terminology in referring to "self-mate combinations" in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (257). Nabokov also applies this term to his short story "Christmas," which "oddly resembles the type of chess problem called 'selfmate'."[14] In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, the "self-mate combinations" seem to involve the episodes of V.'s self-

thwarted research, as when he dutifully burns Sebastian's letters and when he suddenly decides not to interview Clare Bishop. In his most grotesque self-mate, V. rushes to the St. Damier hospital in the hope that the dying Sebastian will reveal "some momentous truth" (200), and he sits outside the half-open door of the room of the patient he mistakes for Sebastian. But this self-mate combination is only the illusion of defeat: "those few minutes I spent listening to what I thought was his breathing changed my life as completely as it would have been changed, had Sebastian spoken to me before dying" (202). For V. has learned his own secret of the interchangeability of souls.

Alice, too, triumphs by resiliency of spirit, after persevering in her adventures in a perplexing world. Although Nabokov may have been unconscious of the parallels, *Through the Looking-Glass* and *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* share images of water, flowers, butterflies, trains, dreams, and mirrors. Perhaps there could be devised a system of correspondences between Nabokov's characters and Carroll's looking-glass creatures (though bishops are never mentioned in *Through the Looking-Glass*, possibly to avoid offending church officials).[15] Prominent among such counterparts might be the White Knight, who helps Alice, as though in another guise of Mr. Silbermann, whose name might be transmuted to Silver Man to White Man to White Knight. In his kindly quaintness, his nonsensical quirks, and his otherworldly quiddity, Mr. Silbermann resembles Carroll's eccentric and generous White Knight.

A striking correspondence involves influence from an invisible world. V. says he is aware of Sebastian's ghost "peering unseen over my shoulder as I write this" (50), his biography in Sebastian's elegant style. Similarly, after passing through the looking-glass, at first remaining larger than the chess pieces and invisible to them, "Alice looked on with great interest as the King took an enormous memorandum-book out of his pocket, and began writing. A sudden thought struck her, and she took hold of the end of the pencil, which came some way over his shoulder, and began writing for him."[16] The most significant correspondence between these two novels, however, is the analogous plot structure, whereby Alice and V. proceed through a series of episodes, in which they engage in often confusing and frustrating conversations, until at last they undergo a metamorphosis. Alice, a lowly pawn, becomes a powerful queen and wins the chess game; V., a mediocre businessman, "not good at wheedling" (178), becomes the brilliant author Sebastian Knight—"I am Sebastian, or Sebastian is I" (203)—and triumphs over carping critics and inept biographers everywhere.[17]

In his chess problems Nabokov expresses an attraction to the option of promoting a pawn to a knight rather than to the much more powerful queen. Indeed, the promotion of a pawn to knight is the main feature of the problem Nabokov calls "my most amusing invention" (*SM* 15), composed in 1932 and numbered 18 in his *Poems and Problems*. Nabokov furthermore invites comparison of his chess problems and his literary work when he explains that his poem "The Execution" contains "a trick of style, a deliberately planted

surprise, not unlike underpromotion in a chess problem" (*PP* 47). It is, of course, a dubious practice to equate the pieces in a chess problem to characters in a novel.[18] Nevertheless, the year after writing *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* Nabokov employed the theme of underpromotion in a tantalizing chess problem, numbered 1 in *Poems and Problems* and described in *Speak, Memory* (291–93).[19] In this problem the solution is to resist the strong temptation of promotion to knighthood, which is successfully countered by a bishop, as though Clare Bishop's intelligent and retiring spirit, if given the chance, might have guided both Sebastian and V. into smoother waters.

V. promotes himself to Knight as a form of homage, whereas Carroll's Alice becomes a queen in her own right, and she never emulates either of the two flighty chess queens she meets beyond the looking-glass, instead cleaving to her stolid Victorian upbringing. In contrast, V., however neurotic, seeks ecstatically to defend and honor Sebastian by assuming his identity after the elaborate process of emulating Sebastian's "manner of being."

V. is acutely sensitive to manner, using the word "manner" in describing himself (77, 88, 152), Mr. Goodman (54), Roy Carswell (117), Madame Lecerf (153), the fictitious Mr. Siller (102), and especially Sebastian (44, 51, 101, 156) and his literary style (93, 112, 180). Sebastian's literary style is of crucial importance to V. in writing his biography by following Sebastian's "undulations": "I cannot even copy his manner because the manner of his prose was the manner of his thinking" (33). V. bewails his own "miserable English," whereupon he claims, maybe sarcastically, to be "hypnotised by the perfect glory of a short story" full of stereotyped characters (33). But somehow V. manages to write his biography in a witty and ebullient manner similar to Sebastian's style in the passages quoted from his fiction.

The thematic importance of manner is suggested, perhaps by spectral influence, in Sebastian's London flat. When V. burns the letters that Sebastian marked for destruction, he momentarily glimpses a single phrase: "Russian words, part of a Russian sentence,—quite insignificant in themselves, really (not that I might have expected from the flame of chance the slick intent of a novelist's plot). The literal English translation would be 'thy manner always to find'" (36). As Rowe points out, "Nabokov is fond of subtly revealing the answer to a mystery while apparently withholding it," and Rowe cites "Kinbote's inability to locate the title 'Pale Fire' ('All I have with me is a tiny vest pocket edition of *Timon of Athens* . . .')," [20] which play is the source of the phrase "pale fire." The reader's discovery of Nabokov's clues, in suddenly seeing great significance in an ordinary phrase, embodies the flash and ecstasy of a metaphysical revelation.

As in Nabokov's later poem "Restoration," V. describes the manner of self-levitation in conjunction with the feeling "that we are on the brink of some absolute truth": "as if we discovered that by moving our arms in some simple, but never yet attempted manner, we could fly" (176). V. then propounds Sebastian's notion of a landscape functioning as a text that a traveler may read

and consequently discover "the intricate pattern of human life" concealed in the landscape's "interwoven letters" (177). V. suspects that in *The Doubtful Asphodel* Sebastian had hidden the "absolute solution," perhaps "intertwined with other words" (178). In an earlier chapter V. has written a crucial explanation of his method: "my quest had developed its own magic and logic and though I sometimes cannot help believing that it had gradually grown into a dream, that quest, using the pattern of reality for the weaving of its own fancies, I am forced to recognise that I was being led right, and that in striving to render Sebastian's life I must now follow the same rhythmical interlacements." V. does not seem to notice that the word "interlacements" contains the letters of the key word "manner." Nor does he notice those interwoven letters as he continues: "There seems to have been a law of some strange harmony in the placing of a meeting relating to Sebastian's first adolescent romance in such close proximity to the echoes of his last dark love" (p. 135). The scrambled letters of "manner" occur in "strange harmony," "meeting relating," and "romance in." The word "manner" is interwoven within other passages as well but to pursue them at length risks veering into Kinbotian temerity.[21]

The effect of these interlacements of "manner" is to simulate the experience of new insight, the breakthrough into a greater level of consciousness. For the reader, the discovery of the interwoven word "manner" resembles what Nabokov in *Speak, Memory* calls "the closest reproduction of the mind's birth": "the stab of wonder that accompanies the precise moment when, gazing at a tangle of twigs and leaves, one suddenly realizes that what had seemed a natural component of that tangle is a marvelously disguised insect or bird" (298).

These interwoven letters and the trope of promotion from pawn to knight are part of the metamorphosis theme, which is also developed by the water imagery in this novel of frequent snow, rain, mist, fog, puddles, and tears. Carswell's portrait of Sebastian, for example, is of a reflection in water, as though the viewer has become Sebastian as Narcissus before his death and metamorphosis. The year of Sebastian's death, 1936, seems to V. "the reflection of that name in a pool of rippling water" (181). V. quotes Sebastian's extended metaphor of death, with "the quay of life gently moving away aflutter with handkerchiefs" (175). As Alexandrov comments about this passage, "the implied journey by water evokes mythic imagery of a transition to life after death."[22]

Water imagery saturates V.'s journey to join the dying Sebastian, as the storm shifts from rain to snow and to rain again. During V.'s night on the train, "the rain spat and tinkled against the glass and a ghost-like snowflake settled in one corner and melted away. Somebody in front of me slowly came to life. . . . Why had I not dashed to the aerodrome as soon as I got that letter? I would have been with Sebastian now!" (190–91). As the reader will learn, Sebastian dies this night, and so at the moment of death V. may indeed be with Sebastian in the form of the "ghost-like snowflake." Although without referring to this instance, Rowe argues that Nabokov often deploys water to

manifest the visitations of the dead, for example, with Olga as a snowflake in *Bend Sinister*, Charlotte as a raindrop in *Lolita*, Armand as a raindrop in *Transparent Things*, and Annette as a hailstone in *Look at the Harlequins!*[23] Rowe also notes that in the poem "Easter," written soon after the death of his father, Nabokov associates the spring thaw with his father's spirit after death.[24] V.'s father is fatally wounded in a duel in a snowstorm (11), and in *Speak, Memory* Nabokov emphasizes the snow on the day in the winter of 1911 when he feared his father might die in a duel (188–93). When his father was killed, on the night of 28 March 1922, Nabokov wrote in his diary that in the afternoon on the train he "had traced on the fogged-up carriage window the word 'happiness'—and every letter trickled downwards in a bright line, a damp wriggle."[25] V.'s snowflake on the train window melts, suggesting the possible movement of ghosts between this world and the hereafter, as water can fluctuate between a liquid and a solid state indefinitely, altering its manner of being as V., following certain undulations, can become Sebastian Knight.

"Like his character Sebastian Knight," writes Pifer, "Nabokov approached the writing of novels as an act of continual discovery, as a problem to which there is no fixed solution."[26] V.'s discovery about the metamorphosis of souls reflects Nabokov's lifelong questioning of the limits of consciousness, which may intuitively glimpse other minds and ghostly other worlds. In *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* Nabokov urges the reader to imagine the soul not as an irreducible element, analogous to a physical object in space, but as a combinational and metamorphic process, a movement in time analogous to music, a manner of being we may discover mingled in quotidian life, thus expanding consciousness and perhaps enabling us, like Fyodor and V., to inhabit the soul of another.

As Sebastian's life, books, and spirit permeate V.'s text, the reader experiences a simulation of the sudden revelations of an expanded consciousness, the ecstasy that in his essay "The Art of Literature and Commonsense" Nabokov defines as "a combined sensation of having the whole universe entering you and of yourself wholly dissolving in the universe surrounding you" (*LL* 378). Even if V. seems "a bogus relative" who has deliberately laced his biography with unacknowledged elements from Sebastian's fiction and life, even if V., like many of Nabokov's protagonists, appears socially inept and neurotic, nevertheless his biography shimmers with suggestions of the spiritual metamorphosis that in his poem "An Evening of Russian Poetry" Nabokov calls a "sublime mutation of the soul" (*PP* 161).

J.B. Sisson

NOTES

1. See Alexandrov, 1991; Boyd, 1981; Sisson, 1979.
2. Moynahan, 1971, p. 8.

3. For discussions of biographical parallels between Nabokov and Sebastian Knight, see Boyd, 1990, pp. 188, 396–97, 496, 501–502; Grabes, 1977, p. 13; Lee, 1976, pp. 97–98; Morton, p. 43; Nicol, 1967, pp. 91–92; O'Connor, 1974, pp. 281–82; Rimmon, p. 119; Stegner, 1966, p. 73; Stuart, pp. 16–17, n. 5; Tammi, 1985, pp. 182, n. 34, 233–34.
4. Field, 1967, p. 26.
5. Toker, 1989, p. 17.
6. Maddox, p. 47; Morton, p. 52.
7. Clancy, p. 91; Karlinsky, *NWL* 21.
8. Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 137–59; Bader, pp. 13–30; Maddox, pp. 35–49; Morton, pp. 43–61; W. Rowe, 1981, pp. 21–25; Stuart, pp. 1–53.
9. Fromberg, pp. 430–32, discusses this possibility that V. may be unrelated to Sebastian.
10. Alexandrov, 1991; W. Rowe, 1981; Boyd, 1990, 1991. Pifer, 1989, pp. 76–77, comments on the benevolence of Nabokov's ghosts.
11. Lee, 1976, p. 24. For comments on Lewis Carroll with regard to *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* see Appel, *AnL* 381–82, n. 131/1; Clancy, p. 90; Fromberg, pp. 434, 435, 436, 439; Lokrantz, p. 70; Olcott, p. 106; Purdy, pp. 384, 391, 393–94, 395. [Editor's note: see also the article on *Ania v strane chudes,* Nabokov's translation of *Alice in Wonderland,* in this volume.]
12. For discussions of references to chess in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* see Lokrantz, pp. 69–70; Olcott, p. 104; Purdy, pp. 384–87; Stegner, 1966, p. 67; Stuart, pp. 14–17, 24. D. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression,* pp. 79–111, and Tammi, 1985, pp. 135–36, discuss chess motifs in Nabokov's *oeuvre.*
13. Bergery, 1992, p. 4.
14. *Details of a Sunset,* p. 152.
15. Lewis Carroll, 1960, p. 187, n. 8.
16. Ibid., p. 190.
17. Stuart, p. 24, comments on this analogy of promotion in chess and V.'s claim of having achieved identity with Sebastian Knight.
18. Despite Sheidlower; Sisson, 1975. For discussions of Nabokov's chess problems, see Gezari, 1974; Gezari and Wimsatt. [Editor's note: see also the article "Chess and Chess Problems" in this volume.]
19. Purdy, pp. 380–81, discusses this chess problem; Sheidlower, pp. 417–24, compares it to some of the action in *Bend Sinister.*
20. W. Rowe, 1981, p. 41.
21. For a discussion of "alphabetic imagery" in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* see D. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression,* pp. 30–31.
22. Alexandrov, 1991, p. 142.
23. W. Rowe, 1981, pp. 14, 58–59, 102, 111.
24. Ibid., p. 139, n. 5. Field, 1967, p. 60, translates "Easter."
25. Boyd, 1990, p. 192.
26. Pifer, 1980, p. 130.

RUSSIAN SHORT STORIES

History

During the first years of his literary career Vladimir Nabokov wrote and published primarily poetry. However, as early as January, 1921, the Berlin Russian émigré newspaper *Rul'* (*The Rudder*) printed "Nezhit'" ("The Sprite"), the first of some fifty Russian short stories by Nabokov; the next story, "Slovo" ("The Word") did not appear until two years later. While in 1921–1923 Nabokov published only original poetry and translations in the Russian periodicals of Berlin, Riga, Prague, and Paris, 1924 was marked by the publication of nine stories; for 1925 the number amounted to five. Over the next fourteen years he continued to publish an average of one to three stories per year, some of which were included in the collections *Vozvrashchenie Chorba* (*The Return of Chorb*, 1930) and *Sogliadatai* (*The Eye*, 1938). After 1939 Nabokov did not write any short stories in Russian; the 1956 Russian collection *Vesna v Fial'te i drugie rasskazy* (*Spring in Fialta and Other Stories*) contained fourteen stories from the 1930s that had not been included in *The Eye*. During the last few years unauthorized reprints of stories from all three collections have appeared in Russia.

Of the early stories published in émigré periodicals in the 1920s Nabokov chose not to include ten in the Russian collections (by contrast, all the stories from the 1930s have been collected). Besides the two aforementioned debuts ("The Sprite" and "The Word"), these include "Draka" ("The Fight"), "Britva" ("The Razor"), "Bogi" ("The Gods"), "Udar kryla" ("Wingstroke"), "Sluchainost'" ("A Matter of Chance"), "Mest'" ("Revenge"), "Rozhdestvenskii rasskaz" ("A Christmas Story"), and "Paskhal'nyi dozhd'" ("Easter Rain"). No copies of the Berlin magazine *Russkoe ekho* (*The Russian Echo*), in which "Easter Rain" was published, seem to have survived (Nabokov mentions this publication in a letter to his mother).[1] Four more stories from the 1920s have remained unpublished: "Zvuki" (Sounds"), "Govoriat po-russki" ("Russian Spoken Here"), "Drakon" ("The Dragon"), and "Poryv" ("The Outburst"). The first three have been preserved in an album kept by Nabokov's mother,[2] the fourth has apparently not survived.[3]

Translations

The destiny of Nabokov's Russian short stories was not limited to the above. Gleb Struve's English translation of "The Return of Chorb" was published in 1932 in Paris, while his translation of "The Passenger" appeared in 1934 in London. In 1941 *The Atlantic Monthly* printed two of Nabokov's stories in a row, both translated by the author in collaboration with Peter Pertzoff. By 1947 "Spring in Fialta" had been added to the two already existing English translations of Nabokov's stories. Later in the same year, the three translations along with five new English short stories and the English version of "Made-

moiselle O" (originally written and published in French) were included in Nabokov's first English-language short-story collection, *Nine Stories*, and subsequently reprinted as part of the collection *Nabokov's Dozen* (1958). However, a meticulous translation of the whole corpus of Nabokov's Russian short stories did not start until 1963, and started then largely due to the efforts of Dmitri Nabokov. In collaboration with his father, Dmitri Nabokov translated many of the short stories that appeared in American and British periodicals before being collected in four volumes: *Nabokov's Quartet* (1966), *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories* (1973, the title story was translated by Simon Karlinsky), *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories* (1975; like *Nabokov's Quartet*, this collection also includes "The Vane Sisters," which was originally written in English), and, finally, *Details of a Sunset and Other Stories* (1976). In the preface to the latter, Nabokov wrote: "This collection is the last patch of my Russian stories meriting to be Englished." From the stories in his Russian collections, Nabokov did not include only two early (plotless) pieces from 1924, "Port" ("The Port") and "Blagost'" ("Grace"); the former, perhaps, seemed too "Russian" to its author. At the same time, Nabokov decided to include in his English collections "A Matter of Chance" (1924)—which remained uncollected in Russian—along with "Solus Rex" (1940), a chapter from the unfinished, eponymous novel. Thus, the total number of Russian short stories (41) remains unchanged in both the Russian and the English collections. Nabokov's Russian short stories have also been translated into many other languages.

The Short Stories and the Novels

The secondary role that Nabokov had assigned to the short story vis-à-vis the novel in an oft-quoted interview where both genres are defined in lepidopterological terms,[4] has been reflected, for example, in the presence of other genres in Nabokov's first two collections of short stories. Thus, *The Return of Chorb* contains over twenty poems, and *The Eye*—an eponymous short novel. An entire series of stories is connected—one way or another—with Nabokov's novels. For example, the short story "Krug" ("The Circle")—in which life of the aristocratic characters in the novel *Dar* (*The Gift*) is seen through the eyes of a village teacher's radical son—was defined by the author himself as "a small satellite separated from the main body of the novel."[5] "Obida" ("A Bad Day") and "Lebeda" ("Orache") are linked to the same events in the writer's childhood that appear in the early chapters of Nabokov's Russian and English biographies, while "Pis'mo v Rossiiu" ("A Letter That Never Reached Russia") and "Admiralteiskaia igla" ("The Admiralty Spire") both treat the theme of first love and thus connect with *Mashen'ka* (*Mary*) and the "Tamara" episode in the autobiographies (relevant here also is the unpublished story "Sounds," in which the adolescent love of the protagonist unravels against the background of a landscape that resembles Vyra). Furthermore, the story "Istreblenie

tiranov" ("Tyrants Destroyed") should be juxtaposed with the novel *Bend Sinister* (they share the motif of having a future dictator as a schoolmate). Likewise, "Korolek" ("The Leonardo") and "Oblako, ozero, bashnia" ("Cloud, Castle, Lake") have a great deal in common with *Priglashenie na kazn'* (*Invitation to a Beheading*). Finally, the first two chapters of the unfinished novel ("Ultima Thule" and "Solus Rex")[6] exist as short stories in their own right, while "A Letter That Never Reached Russia" was published as part of what was announced as the novel *Schast'e* (*Happiness*), begun in 1924 and never completed.[7]

Modern Criticism and Scholarship

Nabokov's Russian stories, much like his entire Russian *oeuvre*, have long been in the shadow of his English writings, and had in fact been practically inaccessible to those readers and scholars without Russian until the mid-1970s. To this day the first and only monographic study of Nabokov's short stories is Marina Turkevich Naumann's book on the Berlin stories of the 1920s,[8] to which a number of interesting articles have been added in recent years. A great deal of material concerning the Russian short stories can be found in both Andrew Field's and Brian Boyd's biographies of Nabokov. An important landmark in the scholarship on Nabokov's stories (the Russian ones in particular) is the collection of articles edited by Charles Nicol and Gennady Barabtarlo.[9]

The sources of Nabokov's achievement in the short story genre lie in Russian psychological prose, namely, the works of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Leskov, on the one hand, and Chekhov and Bunin, on the other. Needless to say, Nabokov reacted to the creative experiences of these writers only in accordance with his own artistic aims. Scholars have noted that the majority of Nabokov's stories are marked by a unity of time and action, and, in contrast to the novels, by an open-ended structure. Likewise, unlike the novels, the short stories often have first-person narrators.[10]

The Short Stories of 1921–1924

Although the earliest of Nabokov's stories can be characterized as fantasy sketches, and are only more or less successful, they nevertheless already contain the overriding motifs of Nabokov's subsequent *oeuvre*. The story "The Sprite" (1921), the theme which could be characterized as "political-ecological," also introduces the nostalgic motif of Russia's idyllic past. It describes an imaginary encounter with a Leshy, a creature from Russian folk mythology, a forest spirit who has fled the brutality and destruction that reign over a land defiled by Communist rule. Similar notes are evoked in the narrator's prayer in "The Word," a Symbolist-like story, after he has ascended to Paradise in his dream and meets with a throng of angels. The narrator asks one of the angels what

would save his native country, and receives as his answer a beautiful word that he cannot repeat or even recall upon awakening. The latter motif acquires key significance for the mature Nabokov and recurs in modified form in "Ultima Thule" as well as in the description of the narrator's dream in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight;* in the novel the narrator hears a phrase in a dream that his brother utters and that sounds like a "striking disclosure" (*RLSK* 188), but that loses its meaning when he wakes up. The theme of the "second reality," the metaphysical plane of being, Nabokov's famous "otherworldliness," is presented in its catastrophic dimension in the image of a demonic angel in the story "Wingstroke" (1923). Paralleling "Wingstroke" is the unpublished story "The Dragon" (1923), which is a fairy-tale of a dragon that leaves its cave for the modern world, only to perish. According to Nabokov, the view of life as a struggle for advantages ruins everything beautiful in the world.[11] In the story "The Gods" (1923) Nabokov tries to capture the transformation of everything original into sheer banality, and continues to seek ways to portray the extraordinary that is hidden behind the mundane.[12]

"The Fight" (1925), which is constructed as a series of observations by its narrator, employs the metapoetic device of showing what other possibilities there are for "twisting" the plot; this livens up the story's somewhat monotonous descriptiveness. The story also projects the author's moral stance, which from the standpoint of a philistine is amoral, and which privileges "the harmony of trifles, collected today, right now in their unique and unrecurring way" ("garmoniiu melochei, sobrannykh vot segodnia, seichas edinstvennym i nepovtorimym obrazom") over "human suffering and joy" ("stradanii i radostei chelovecheskikh"). The story "A Matter of Chance" (1924) treats the subject of fate's coincidences and ironies that structure a long chain of chance events to prevent a husband and wife from meeting; subsequently this theme was elaborated upon in the summary of Sebastian Knight's invented novel *Success*. In "The Passenger" (1927, from the collection *The Return of Chorb*), which was written as "a writer's conversation with a critic," Nabokov maintained that "The Word is given the sublime right to enhance chance and to make of the transcendental something that is not accidental."[13] Without exaggeration, one could say that throughout his artistic career Nabokov remained faithful to this credo, which he followed and perfected.

Another motif, the conflict of two worlds, Russian émigré and Communist, is developed brilliantly in the story "Vstrecha" ("The Reunion"), and receives humorous treatment in the unpublished "Russian Spoken Here" (1923). In the latter, a Russian émigré family captures a Soviet agent and for years keeps him in their bathroom. Similarly, in the 1926 story "The Razor" a *chekist* (an agent of the KGB's forerunner, the ChK) finds himself getting a shave from his former victim, now a barber. In 1928 Nabokov wrote "A Christmas Story," which is marked by a typically Nabokovian thought: exile is preferable to the life of lies that becomes the norm for post-1917 Russia, while talent can survive only in the emigration. This is thought to be the most

didactic of all of Nabokov's stories, which is probably why he never reprinted it.[14]

The Return of Chorb

The collection *The Return of Chorb*, which was published in 1930 by the Berlin firm Slovo under the pen-name V. Sirin, was inevitably perceived by critics in the reflected light of Nabokov's novels. One reviewer noted that "Sirin's short stories are somewhat weaker than his novels," while another concluded after comparing the short stories with the novels, that "in [the former] one finds the same pointedness of language and narration, structured on the principle of renewing material, the same intentionally chance nature of the point of departure [. . .] the same refined power of observation of a man who loves life because it is the sole splendid material for creative transformation."[15]

The themes of a number of stories from this collection have already been discussed in connection with Nabokov's earlier stories, which adumbrated his later writings to some extent. "Putevoditel' po Berlinu" (1925, "A Guide to Berlin") is closest to the early plotless stories, and Nabokov noted the following in the preface to its English translation: "despite its simple appearance this Guide is one of my trickiest stories."[16] In this "Bergsonian" story, with its non-parallel figurations of time and space, details of "average" Middle European daily life, such as a streetcar imagined as a museum object in the twenty-first century, or a Berlin beerhall seen through the eyes of a child, are given the shape of a "future recollection."[17] There are also fantastical stories in the collection. In "Groza" ("The Thunderstorm," 1924) a storm appears to the narrator as Elijah the Prophet's chariot, which has lost a wheel in his courtyard. The evolution of Nabokov's creative method is especially evident when one compares this story with "Skazka" ("A Nursery Tale," 1927), in which the protagonist encounters the Devil in the shape of a woman capable of guessing the protagonist's desires. She offers him the opportunity to choose a whole harem of young women during the course of one day. The only condition is that the number of women has to be odd; however, the thirteenth, whom he chooses at the last moment, turns out to be the first.

The theme of metaphysical horror that possesses a man who has seen the world "as it actually is," outside conventional notions and associations, appears in "Uzhas" ("Terror," 1927). The literary genealogy of this story goes back to the confessional monologues of the lyrical hero in Dostoevsky's short novels (*Notes from the Underground*, *The Meek Girl*), to Bunin's novellas of the early 1920s ("Konets" ["The End"], "Polunochnaia zarnitsa" ["Midnight Lightning in Summer"]), to the late works of Tolstoy, and in broader terms, to the European metaphysical tradition as reflected in certain philosophical and psychological models.[18] The story might have received a concrete impetus from "Zvezdnyi uzhas" ("Starry Terror"), a posthumously published poem by

Nikolai Gumilev who was executed by the Bolsheviks in 1921 and whom Nabokov esteemed highly.

The theme of "Blagost'" ("Grace") can be defined as the loneliness of a passionate man, an artist (he is a sculptor), who realizes in the depths of his soul that he is not loved, that *she* will break their date. An unexpected meeting with a poor old woman selling postcards, her sympathy for him, distracts him from his anguish and redirects his attention to the world before his eyes. This is also one of the first stories where the writer treats the theme of creation: the mysterious, magical inception of the future child within the depths of the artist's personality, the theme of the first shiver of a sprout inside a grain ("in my fingers I felt the soft tickling of a thought that was beginning to create"). In subsequent years the writer would return to this theme with increasing insistence in such stories as "Tiazhelyi dym" ("Torpid Smoke"), "Nabor" ("Recruiting"), "Pamiati L. I. Shigaeva" ("In Memory of L. I. Shigaev"), "Vasiliy Shishkov," etc. This is also a theme in the novel *The Gift* (1952). It is worth noting that this theme is absent from the English stories of the 1940s-1950s.

Other stories in the collection also treat the theme of an artist who creates his own sui generis world. Among such creators is the conjurer Shock in "Kartofel'nyi El'f" ("The Potato Elf," 1924). This story, which Nabokov considered one of his weakest, is tangentially linked to his work on an unfinished film script, "Love of a Dwarf."[19] For both his wife, Nora, and his circus partner, the dwarf Fred Dobson, Shock is more of a poet than a conjurer. He is an unusual person, and his appearance reflects that. A conjurer by trade (a magician!), he is immersed in his own thoughts, in his own private, albeit vacillating, world, into which he lets no one; and this world of fancy, dreams, and tricks is what he cherishes most. Despite a seeming shakiness and fragility of appearance, Shock is a remarkably strong person owing to his spirit, to his dream. His imaginary world turns out to be much firmer, more spacious and powerful than the mundane orbits of Nora's and Fred's lives. Reality crushes the two latter characters: Fred dies, Nora is broken by grief, while Shock survives, standing firm in his unique galaxy, the shadowy world where he feels most at home. By contrast, the half-demented pianist virtuoso Bachmann from the eponymous story (1924), which in many ways anticipates *The Defense*, reverses Shock's path: he slips from being a world-renowned musician and composer, the author of "The Golden Fugue," to a degraded drunkard weeping beside a broken juke-box. The protagonist of the title story, the writer Chorb, appears to his bourgeois father-in-law to be a "destitute émigré litterateur." After the death of his wife, Chorb seeks to bring her image to the point of "perfection" by passing through a "tormenting and sweet temptation": he recapitulates their elopement from their wedding back to the hotel where they had spent their wedding night and where his in-laws now find him in the same room with a prostitute, whom he has not touched, just as he did not touch his wife during their first night.

Although only one story out of the fifteen in *The Return of Chorb* takes place in Russia, namely "Rozhdestvo" ("Christmas")—twelve stories are set in Germany, predominantly in Berlin, one in Marseilles, and one in England—all but three characters in the collection are Russian émigrés. The author himself is present to some extent in two of the stories, and saturates his tales with personal memories, sensations, thoughts, and opinions.

To the Russian village in which "Christmas" (1924) is set Nabokov grants traits of the family estate in which he spent his childhood. The story contains a description of the burial vault of Nabokov's maternal grandfather, I. V. Rukavishnikov, where his son, Vladimir, was buried after his early death from consumption. This crypt is still located by the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin in the village of Rozhdestveno. Nabokov portrays his protagonist, Sleptsov, at a tragic point in his life: he has just buried his son, and is sitting in the boy's room and going through his possessions. The boy was fond of catching and collecting butterflies (another autobiographical detail) and kept a diary. Leafing through it, Sleptsov (whose last name here begins to speak because it comes from the Russian root "slep," meaning "blind") is struck by how little he actually knew about his son: "Sleptsov [. . .] has a fleeting sensation that earthly life lay before him, totally bared and comprehensible—and ghastly in its sadness, humiliatingly pointless, sterile, devoid of miracles."[20] At this point a miracle occurs: a huge tropical butterfly emerges out of a cocoon. With gentle irony the author underscores Sleptsov's spiritual blindness. "Christmas" is one of the few stories in which Nabokov openly expresses his belief in Providence, a supreme will that reveals its face to man, burdened as he is by the knowledge of earthly laws. This miraculous occurrence—and for Nabokov few things are more beautiful than a butterfly—is a sign given to a human being in the state of utmost despair.

Finally, it should be mentioned that stories like "Zvonok" ("The Doorbell") and "Podlets" ("An Affair of Honor") pay tribute to the traditions of the Russian psychological novella. "The Doorbell" is about a son's meeting—after years of being apart—with his mother, who is trying to act youthful, and how he catches her by surprise when she is expecting her lover. In "An Affair of Honor," the most Chekhovian among Nabokov's stories,[21] the writer debunks a major Romantic topos in Russian literature, that of the duel.[22] In the story a husband challenges his wife's lover, who is known to have killed hundreds of Reds during the Civil War of 1918–1922, but then runs away and thereby cancels the duel. Along with "Khvat" ("A Dashing Fellow") and "Usta k ustam" ("Lips to Lips"), "An Affair of Honor" belongs to the few stories that Nabokov included in a collection without its previous publication in a periodical.

The Eye

Nabokov's second collection of stories, *The Eye*, came out in Paris in 1938 and contained the eponymous short novel (first published in 1930) and twelve

stories from the 1930s. Ten of them are set in Germany, chiefly in Berlin, two in Russia. Although the protagonist of "Zaniatoi chelovek" ("A Busy Man," 1931) carries a foreign name ("Graf It" in the Russian original; "Grafitski" in the English translation), he is nonetheless a Russian like the protagonists of ten out of the twelve stories in the collection. Only three stories in the book are narrated from the first person. The same character, a boy by the name of Putia ("Peter" in English) Shishkov, appears in two stories, "Obida" ("A Bad Day") and "Lebeda" ("Orache"). "Orache" (1932) provides the reader with the last name of Putia's father, G.D. Shishkov. The initial letter of his patronymic is the same as that of Nabokov's own father. In fact, Shishkov was the maiden name of V. D. Nabokov's maternal grandmother, Nina Aleksandrovna. Putia's deskmate at school bears the name Dima Korf ("Dmitri" in English). Korf was the name of Nabokov's paternal grandmother. The story line of "Orache" is based on G.D. Shishkov's duel with a certain Count Tumanski ("tuman" means "fog" in Russian). In actuality, V.D. Nabokov was supposed to fight a duel in 1911; but it never took place, and this event was later retold in Nabokov's autobiographies. About G.D. Shishkov Nabokov wrote that he "was busy in a place known as the Parliament (where a couple of years earlier the ceiling had collapsed)."[23] V.D. Nabokov had been elected a Member of the First Russian Duma (or Parliament) in 1906. It remains to be added that like Putia's father in the story, Nabokov's father also took fencing lessons from a Frenchman.

The action of "A Bad Day" (1931), which was dedicated to Ivan Bunin, takes place in the country estate of the Kozlovs, where Putia has been invited to the Nameday celebration of his classmate, Volodia (diminutive of "Vladimir") Kozlov. Vladimir's Nameday is celebrated on July 28, and the story describes a hot summer day on a country estate outside St. Petersburg. From the description in the story it is possible to conclude that the estate in question is very much like Rozhdestveno with its Church of the Nativity of the Virgin, which was also described in "Christmas" but against the background of a winter landscape. The maiden name of Nabokov's maternal grandmother was Ol'ga Nikolaevna Kozlova. Among the children who come to Volodia Kozlov's party we encounter Dima Korf and Vasia Tuchkov (the writer's uncle, Sergei Dmitrievich Nabokov, was married to a Dari'a Nikolaevna Tuchkov). In the preface to the English translation, Nabokov wrote that "the little boy of the story, though living in much the same surroundings as those of my own childhood, differs in several ways from my remembered self which is really split here among three lads, Peter, Vladimir, and Vasiliy."[24] The prototype of the Kozlov boys' tutor is probably Filip Osipovich Zelensky (called Lenski in Nabokov's autobiographies), who had served as tutor to Vladimir and Sergei Nabokov. The French governess of the Kozlov children resembles in some ways the Mademoiselle who had come to Vyra from Switzerland in 1905 and lived with the Nabokovs for seven years.

Both "Putia" stories take place in the townhouse of Putia's father and in his suburban estate, which has traits drawn from both Rozhdestveno and Vyra. In "A Bad Day" Putia hides in a veranda with multicolored glass windows (a gazebo with such windows did in fact exist in Vyra, and it was there that Nabokov's earliest poems were born). Putia watches the world around him through colored glass. Thus emerges the theme of glass that divides man from the true world—glass in its primary function, as a screen, a form of protection, an obstacle, etc. This glass motif is reconsidered in "Sovershenstvo" ("Perfection," 1932). In turn, the latter story raises the theme of an earlier piece, "Katastrofa" ("Details of a Sunset"), to a metaphysical level, and is also filled with autobiographical details. Its protagonist, Ivanov, shares many traits with his creator: he is a needy Russian émigré who accompanies his pupil to a resort. In fact, Nabokov had also accompanied a pupil to the shores of the Baltic Sea. Ivanov owns a cheap one-volume collection of Pushkin's works and never parts with it. In other stories Nabokov also equips his favorite characters with a similar volume (cf. "In Memory of V.I. Shigaev"). As his last name suggests, Ivanov is an ordinary man, a widespread type, who loves life passionately and dreams of experiencing everything himself, of comprehending the meaning of nature and of man's soul. An obstacle, an invisible glass pane, prevents him from achieving his goal. After Ivanov drowns, the glass between him and the world disappears, and he finally achieves that perfection for which he had longed.

The motif of death in its gnoseological aspect marks several other stories in *The Eye*. Thus, in "A Busy Man" the author, along with Grafitski, attempts but fails to investigate the nature of death after receiving a prophecy of death in "a recollection of a recollection." The hallucinating protagonist of "Terra Incognita" (1931) seems to experience a tropical journey on his deathbed; he then notices that objects in his room in a northern capital show through his delirious mirage, and realizes that these genuine objects are merely a falsification, the decorations of death. He tries to write down something that seems to be most essential, but as in other similar cases, he dies before he is able to do anything. (A probable source for this story is a fantastical novella by Vladimir Amfiteatrov-Kadashev, "Zelenoe tsarstvo" ["The Green Kingdom"] in which a dying traveler exists simultaneously in two realities).[25] Via death the entomologist Pilgram, the protagonist of "The Aurelian" (1930), finally undertakes the journey for which his entire life has been a preparation: "Most probably he visited Granada and Murcia and Albarracion, and then traveled farther still . . . [and] saw all the glorious bugs he had longed to see."[26] The stories in the collection present death in the most varied aspects, from deeply metaphysical (see above) and tragic, as in "Krasavitsa" ("A Russian Beauty," 1934) to cheaply dramatic as in "Sluchai iz zhizni" ("A Slice of Life," 1935), or even "Khvat" ("A Dashing Fellow," 1932) with its deliberately vapid characters and intrigue. The latter story gains a certain liminal quality towards the end when the male protagonist conceals the news of her father's death from

the story's female protagonist. The story ends with the words "And then, sometime later, we die."[27] Back in the 1930s the story seemed so disturbing that as Nabokov recalls in his preface, "two leading émigré papers rejected it as improper and brutal."[28]

In *The Eye* we do not encounter artistic characters, although Pilgram is an artist of sorts since he is consumed by his passion. There is, however, a story ("Music," 1932) in which the protagonist, a person without any inclinations towards music (and in that resembling Nabokov) finds himself in the same room with his ex-wife during an amateur musical recital. He then understands that art, namely, music, "which before had seemed a narrow dungeon where, shackled together by the resonant sounds, they had been compelled to sit face to face some twenty feet apart, had actually been incredible bliss, a magic glass dome that had embraced and imprisoned him and her."[29] However, it is precisely in those stories that depict the Russian milieu in Berlin and belong to the tradition of Russian psychological prose ("A Slice of Life," "A Russian Beauty," "Breaking the News") that Nabokov reaches the highest artistry, each of them being a beautifully crafted and fascinating psychological novella.

Spring in Fialta

In May 1940 Nabokov and his family left Europe for the United States, and he made the decision to write in English. A new, lengthy period of his career began (nearly twenty years) during which he worked a great deal: teaching Russian language, Russian and European literature, doing lepidopterological research, giving lectures throughout the country, while also writing, now almost exclusively in English. The strength of his decision to give up the only thing of value that he had managed to save—his native tongue—masks the profound tragedy he had to endure, which he confessed in his letters to his wife and to friends (e.g., G. Gessen).[30] Even the writer's painful farewell poem to the Russian language was also written in English.[31]

And still two remarkable events occur in Nabokov's literary biography in the 1950s. In 1952 the complete text of *The Gift*—the greatest Russian novel of this century—was finally published in New York by Chekhov Publishing House. In 1956 the same publisher brought out the collection *Spring in Fialta* as a special gift to Russian readers wherever they may be. Nabokov's love for his native roots, which saturates this book, is a kind of obsession. There are fourteen stories in the collection, all written in the 1930s in Europe. Nine are narrated from the first person. Many of the stories had originally been published in Paris, in the newspaper *Poslednie novosti* (*The Latest News*) and the journal *Sovremennye zapiski* (*Contemporary Annals*). Fifteen years later, in 1970, Nabokov would make a confession that explained—among other things—the publication of *Spring in Fialta* sixteen years after his departure for the United States. In the preface to the translation of *Mary* Nabokov spoke of his sentimental attachment to his first novel, and described nostalgia as the

"insane companion" with whose "heartrending oddities" he had already gotten used to appearing in public (*Mary* xiv).

This was also the theme of the aforementioned "A Letter That Never Reached Russia" from *The Return of Chorb,* which was later developed in "The Admiralty Spire." The heroine, now named Katya, embodies Nabokov's first love, who was also described in the autobiographies and given the name Tamara (her real name was Valentina Evgen'evna Shul'gina). They met in the summer of 1915 when he was sixteen and she fifteen. They last saw each other in the summer of 1917. In April 1919, the Nabokovs emigrated while Tamara stayed in the Ukraine.

In "The Admiralty Spire" the author employs a special compositional device: the story is written in the form of a letter to the invented writer Sergei Solntsev, the author of the novel *The Admiralty Spire.* The novel distorts and banalizes a sixteen-year-old romance between the narrator (and author of the letter) and Katya. The reader is presented with Katya's image, a lovely, charming, not overly intelligent young lady from a philistine family, with average literary and musical tastes, who loves sentimental novels, but who is still "beautiful, impenetrably beautiful, and so adorable that I could cry."[32]

The narrator has a lot in common with the young, enamored Nabokov of the years 1915–1917. The fact that the narrator addresses Solntsev as "colleague" points again to the story's autobiographical nature. In "The Admiralty Spire" images of Nabokov's first love figure for the last time in such pure form. There is, however, a brilliant variation on Mary and Katya, namely, Nina in the 1936 story "Spring in Fialta." Nina is the same age as this century, and therefore as Tamara. The male protagonist of the story meets Nina in the winter of 1917 at his aunt's nameday party at her country estate in Luga near St. Petersburg: "how well I remember the first sign of nearing the place: a red barn in a white wilderness."[33] A red barn used to stand on the way to Rozhdestveno, on the highway to Luga. Like Tamara, Nina is not very intelligent, but sweet and charming. Her main trait is a talent for giving her love without asking for anything in return. The protagonist of "Spring in Fialta" is one of the author's representatives (Nabokov's term) with whom he shares certain features. The protagonist's meeting with Nina at the Luga estate in winter recalls Nabokov's own meeting with Tamara in Rozhdestveno in August, 1915. "Spring in Fialta" is a fantasy about what could have happened had Tamara not stayed in Russia. In the final scene the protagonist experiences a genuine feeling that breaks through toward Nina like the sun over Fialta through the clouds. Alas, he does not have enough strength to redirect his life; the usual routine turns out to be stronger.

The action of the story develops against the background of false, unnatural relationships which permeate surrounding life, and which look like the playbills of a traveling circus that are pasted all over the streets of Fialta. Nina dies in an accident: the car collides with a circus truck, thereby showing the dominance of this "unreal," "circus," "painted" life over the genuine one. Nina

dies while her husband and his friend are unhurt. The story's protagonist goes on with his previous life, although it is poisoned by the loss of his beloved Nina. Like in *Invitation to a Beheading*, so-called real life appears to Nabokov as a set of decorations, a circus playbill, while genuine life is hidden in the depths. Despite all her weaknesses, Nina embodies the life of the soul. She is unhappy and doomed to die. Such is Tamara's evolution in Nabokov's Russian stories.

"Spring in Fialta" contains an extremely important formulation that identifies imagination as the motive force of the creative process, and that also attempts to characterize human memory: "were I a writer [says the narrator] I should allow only my heart to have imagination, and for the rest rely upon memory, that long-drawn sunset shadow of one's personal truth."[34]

The theme of creation is the focus of "Torpid Smoke" (1935). If "The Circle" (1934) was referred to by Nabokov as a satellite of *The Gift* that had broken away and started to live independently, "Torpid Smoke" could be characterized as a branch, an offshoot from the first chapter of *The Gift*, namely its pages describing the creation of the poem "Thank you, my land" (*Gift* 29, 56). "Torpid Smoke" depicts the young poet Grisha composing poetry. At the basis of this process is an impression he has of seeing a stream of smoke spreading over a roof; the autumnal smoke is heavy with moisture and cannot soar into the air. Some time later this feeling, which has settled in the depths of Grisha's consciousness, evolves and is shaped and transformed into verse. Despite some similarity to the author (Grisha is tall, skinny, wears a pince-nez) the young poet does not resemble Nabokov very much. His family is entirely different: his mother has died, he lives with his father and older sister. In the preface to the English translation Nabokov purposely emphasizes the disparity between his characters and any of the Nabokovs. Nevertheless, the author can be glimpsed here and there in the text: the poor student Grisha is a Russian émigré living in Berlin; although he lives with his family he is nonetheless lonely. Grisha's favorite books are listed in the text. At different times they pleased Nabokov himself: Baratynsky and Gumilev, Hoffman and Hölderlin, Pasternak's *My Sister, Life*, Gazdanov's *An Evening at Claire's*, *The Defense* (!) and others. Throughout the story, the third person pronoun "he" alternates with the first person "I" when the writing of poetry is described. The same transitions from third to first person occur constantly in *The Gift*.

Creative processes are also investigated in "Recruiting" (1935). Reminiscent of Nabokov's walks around Berlin with his son,[35] "Recruiting" is a first-person narrative. The narrator (who is a fiction writer) tells the reader that for the past three years he has been working on a novel, which is biographically comparable to Nabokov's work on *The Gift*. The narrator seeks new images, which he calls "recruits." He does in fact recruit an old man whom he needs in order to write a single chapter or, perhaps, even phrase. But a writer rules over an immense world created by his imagination; he is almighty and overfilled with creative energy. He is capable of experiencing the "terrible power of bliss" that he desires to share with at least one person since otherwise

his happiness is a "stifling" and "wild" one. The purpose of "recruiting" is for this bliss to "cease being a unique sensation, a most rare variety of madness, a monstrous sunbow spanning my whole inner being, and be accessible to two people at least, becoming their topic of conversation and thus acquiring rights to routine existence, of which my wild, savage, stifling happiness is otherwise deprived."[36]

A recruited person has a double function: to serve as material for the creation of images, and then, through this incarnation in images, also to share this "unlawful" bliss with the author. However, in the story the writer does not do the recruiting himself—for he is free in his actions—but rather sends his "representative," a "gentleman with a Russian paper" to the bench where the recruit, an old man, sits. The mighty author of the novel even invents a name for him (Vasili Ivanovich) and a biography (we even find mention of a "Moscow society lady A. M. Aksakova," Nabokov's distant relative). Thus, the author's "representative" is a kind of hypostasis of him, a particle of his authorial being, and it is not by chance that the description of the representative brings up the notion of a self-portrait. The recruit, Vasili Ivanovich, then leaves, but not before he has been "taken" and given an "extraordinary disease." This connection, established between the author and the person he has recruited, will now enter a work of literature, and will allow the imaginary world to gain "rights to life," i.e., to be equated with real life. The two worlds, imaginary and real, become equal.

Perhaps the most memorable image of the author's "representative," his alter ego, was introduced in "Oblako, ozero, bashnia" ("Cloud, Castle, Lake," 1937), one of Nabokov's favorite stories.[37] In 1937 Nabokov left Berlin to move to Paris. Before his departure, he traveled to Prague with his wife and three-year-old son to visit his mother, Elena Ivanovna Nabokova. The Nabokovs spend June of 1937 in Marienbad. Although the writer remarks that views like the one described in the story are plentiful in Europe, it was probably in Bohemia that he in fact observed (or imagined) a blue lake with a black castle and a white cloud reflected in it: it is not for nothing that the owner of the house on the lakeshore speaks German poorly and understands Russian "as in a dream." The protagonist, a Russian émigré named Vasili Ivanovich, is a modest bachelor. He, too, "represents" the author who, as it were, owns a firm where Vasili Ivanovich is an employee. Vasili Ivanovich wins a trip, and being observant, "fixes" everything he sees in his memory as in a photograph. Thrice in the story we encounter confessions of love for Russian nature, for the protagonist's native land, and, finally—upon beholding the cloud-castle-lake view—for his ideal of beauty. But nothing comes of his desire to stay at the lake: Vasili Ivanovich's German companions are ferociously against it. They seem to merge into one whole, "forming one collective, wobbly, many-handed being, from which one could not escape."[38] At first they only laugh at Vasili Ivanovich, who is an alien among them, but then they start humiliating him and finally beat him severely. Thus, neither Vasili Ivanovich

nor the narrator–author have in fact been able to experience happiness. Vasili Ivanovich is brutally brought back to reality and not even allowed to glance back. At the end of the story Vasili Ivanovich, now spiritually and physically ravaged, resigns from his position and begs to be let go, which the "firm's owner" does. Something dies within the author himself after he lets his companion go. One could see "The Leonardo" ("Korolek," 1933) as a low-key variant of the same plot. In it a Russian tenant who annoys his neighbors by his unusual character and behavior is subjected to all sorts of provocations and persecutions and is finally murdered by two German brothers. But when the reader is almost completely certain that the victim is another poet it turns out that the murdered Russian with the "Romantic" surname Romantovski was "only" a counterfeiter.

Another story from the collection that could be described as a pessimistic treatment of everyday life bears the title "In Memory of L.I. Shigaev." Written in 1934 as a first-person narrative of a young man named Victor, it is another portrait in Nabokov's gallery of Berlin émigrés. Victor recalls the way he was eleven years ago, i.e., in 1923: "a pale youth . . . with his livid forehead and black beard, dressed only in a torn shirt."[39] He calls this year horrible, and it was also horrible for Nabokov: in March 1922, his father was killed in Berlin; in January 1923, his engagement with Svetlana Siewert had to be broken off. Victor used to drink a great deal, to the extent of seeing demons everywhere, even sitting on a volume of Pushkin. The reader concludes that Victor is still unhappy, lonely, and still drinks; his life has been ruined, and he himself does not have any hope for the future. His every moment is a farewell to people and everything around him. This is an image of a human being brought to utmost desperation.

"Vasiliy Shishkov" (1939) is Nabokov's last Russian short story. It reflects the events immediately preceding his departure for the United States and captures the atmosphere of the late 1930s. Everything is in motion, all the characters are going someplace: the narrator (who is the author), German refugees, and Vasiliy Shishkov who is also trying to leave. In this story the author provides a realistic self-portrait; here Nabokov's visor is more open than anywhere else. Not hiding behind someone else's mask, Nabokov creates another of his "representatives," the Russian poet Vasiliy Shishkov who is charged with much of Nabokov's own personality (in fact Shishkov was the maiden name of his great-grandmother, the Baroness Nina von Korf).

In 1939 Nabokov wrote two poems under the pseudonym Vasiliy Shishkov: "Poety" ("The Poets") and "K Rossii" ("To Russia": "Otviazhis'—ia tebia umoliaiu" ["Will you leave me alone? I implore you"]). The critic G.V. Adamovich—who was sceptical about Nabokov's own poetry—"swallowed the bait." He praised the two poems and hailed the birth of a new Russian talent.

The fictitious name acquires meaning in the story as well as flesh and blood: Vasiliy Shishkov becomes a real character. Nabokov endows his

"representative" with such epithets as "an extraordinary attractive, pure, melancholy human being." He is well built, has thick lips, grey eyes, and a "comfortable handshake." His firm handwriting "emanate[s] health and talent," and he is in fact a fine poet. Shishkov suffers from life's vapidness, and strives for an active existence: "I am bursting with the urge to do something." But his plan to fight vapidness with a literary journal fails. He realizes that there is no way out and decides "to disappear, to dissolve."[40] Shishkov represents another hypostasis of Nabokov the poet. Nabokov says (not without reason) that his Shishkov is an obscure persona without a future, that he is bound to drown in his own verses, to dissolve in them. Shishkov will disappear, but his verses—a kind of tomb—will remain.

This is the unusual way in which Nabokov parts with Russian poetry, and, more broadly, with all of Russia; he buries his Russian past and erects a gravestone of verses over himself as a poet. He considers this gravestone transparent enough to allow the poet himself—and the secret essence he expressed in his poems—to be seen. However, he doubts whether a future reader would be able to see what exactly the author expressed in his works. The story ends with a rhetorical question in the form of a line of verse: "Ne pereotsenil li on [Shishkov] 'prozrachnost' i prochnost' takoi neobychnoi grobnitsy'?" (did he "not overestimate 'The transparence and soundness / Of such an unusual coffin'?").[41]

Another émigré literary scandal stands in the background of "Lips to Lips" (1931), a story that was aimed at the Paris journal *Chisla* (*Numbers*), which was associated with Nabokov's literary adversaries, Z. Gippius, G. Adamovich, and G. Ivanov; the latter had published a very crude article about Nabokov's novels in the first issue.[42] "Lips to Lips" describes how a literary journal, *Arion,* publishes several pages from a monstrous novel *Lips to Lips* by an émigré writer who is a graphomaniac for the sole purpose of obtaining his financial support. The poor author, who is a sympathetic widower, and has no understanding of literature, learns of the hoax from a chance conversation. The actual prototype of *Arion*, *Numbers,* had in fact done something similar with the talentless writings of a certain Aleksandr Burov. As Nabokov explains in the preface to the English translation, the Paris newspaper *Poslednie novosti* (*The Latest News*) had actually composed his story but then "broke up the type" at the last moment, after which the story had to wait another twenty-five years before it was published.[43]

"Tyrants Destroyed" (1938) recalls, on the one hand, "The Leonardo" and "Cloud, Castle, Lake," while, on the other, it also anticipates the novel *Bend Sinister* with its central theme of the despotic dictator Paduk. Nabokov's hatred for both worst dictators of this century, the "red" and the "brown" one, is resolved unexpectedly in the story, namely, via the "old well-tested method"—laughter. At the very moment when the narrator is ready to commit suicide in order to kill the tyrant, he suddenly sees that the latter, together with his whole

heavy-weight cult, is ridiculous; once the frightening becomes laughable it loses its power in complete accordance with ancient models. Another image of a despot, this time debased to a household setting and going back to Nabokov's high-school memories, can be found in the story "Lik." In his preface to the English translation, Nabokov stresses the theatricality of the story: "it . . . attempts to create the impression of a stage performance engulfing a neurotic performer though not quite in the way that the trapped actor expected when dreaming of such an experience."[44] Apparently, the meek actor Lik, who has already twice buried his tormentor in his thoughts, cannot be reconciled with the fact that the latter has survived both times; Lik is therefore ready if not to kill him in his mind then to make him commit suicide. On this level the "play's finale" is ambivalent: it remains unclear whether Lik actually witnesses Koldunov's suicide when he returns for his shoes, or whether it is only a vision Lik experiences when dying of a heart attack on the seashore. The character's significant pseudonym, Lik ("image" in Russian), is related to the name of Hugh Person ("persona") in Nabokov's penultimate novel *Transparent Things* in terms of the important metapoetic implications both names have.

Acceding to a friend's request, the protagonist of "The Visit to the Museum" enters a provincial museum with its motley displays and "matter dematerialized," and finds himself in a surreal and infernal world from which he exits into Russia; however, it is not the Russia of his memory "but the factual Russia of today, forbidden to me, hopelessly slavish, and hopelessly my own native land." Nabokov scholars have compared this story with the museum episode in Sartre's novel *La Nausée* and, in a broader context, interpreted it as a reflecting the "descent into hell" motif in the Western literary tradition.[45]

The collection is closed by "Ultima Thule" (1940)—the first chapter from the unfinished novel—which develops a central theme of Nabokov's *oeuvre*. In Greco-Roman mythology, Ultima Thule stands for the northernmost boundary of the world, its farthest border. The protagonist, Adam Falter, suddenly discovers some sort of transcendent knowledge, or the "essence of things." But this knowledge is destructive, for it kills the doctor who convinces Falter to reveal his secret. The narrator also tries in vain to find out Falter's secret: the latter responds with evasive sophisms, and carries his secret, if it in fact exists at all, to his grave (the possibility of a mystification is implied by Falter's name which, among other things, is a derivative of the Romance root meaning "to deceive," "to mystify").

"Ultima Thule" is the last short story that Nabokov wrote in Russian. In later years, he returned to writing Russian prose only twice, when he translated his autobiography *Conclusive Evidence* (*Drugie berega*, 1954) and *Lolita*; he referred to this last work in Russian as a "bibliophile's whim."

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Translated from the Russian by Maxim D. Shrayer

NOTES

1. Boyd, 1990, p. 231.
2. Vladimir Nabokov Archive, Elena Ivanovna Nabokov Album, The Berg Collection, New York Public Library. See Boyd, 1990, pp. 217, 220, 230.
3. D. Johnson, 1993, p. 39.
4. Parker, 1991, p. 69.
5. *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*, p. 226.
6. D. Johnson, "Vladimir Nabokov's *Solus Rex*.
7. *Details of a Sunset and Other Stories*, p. 82.
8. Naumann, *Blue Evenings in Berlin*.
9. Nicol and Barabtarlo, 1993.
10. Ibid., pp. ix-xv.
11. Boyd, 1990, p. 236.
12. Ibid., p. 219.
13. *Details of a Sunset and Other Stories*, p. 79.
14. Kuzmanovich.
15. Tsetlin, p. 530; G. K., p. 191.
16. *Details of a Sunset and Other Stories*, p. 90.
17. Grossmith, 1993, pp. 149–54.
18. D. Johnson, 1993.
19. Boyd, 1990, p. 230.
20. *Details of a Sunset and Other Stories*, p. 160.
21. Karlinsky, "Nabokov and Chekhov." [Editor's note: see "Nabokov and Chekhov" in this volume.]
22. *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*, p. 82.
23. *Details of a Sunset and Other Stories*, p. 46.
24. Ibid., p. 28.
25. Amfiteatrov-Kadashev, 1923. This source was discovered by Alexander Dolinin.
26. *Nabokov's Dozen*, p. 110.
27. *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*, p. 143.
28. Ibid., p. 130.
29. *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories*, p. 68.
30. Field, 1977, pp. 249–50.
31. Nabokov, "Softest of Tongues."
32. *Tyrants Destroyed*, p. 137.
33. *Nabokov's Dozen*, p. 17.
34. Ibid., p. 24.
35. Boyd, 1990, p. 420.
36. *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories*, p. 109.
37. Boyd, 1990, p. 439.
38. *Nabokov's Dozen*, p. 118.
39. *Tyrants Destroyed and Other Stories*, p. 161.
40. Ibid., pp. 207, 208, 212, 215.
41. Ibid, p. 215.
42. See Boyd, 1990, pp. 373–74.
43. *A Russian Beauty and Other Stories*, p. 51.
44. *Nabokov's Quartet*, p. 9.
45. See De Roeck.

THE SONG OF IGOR'S CAMPAIGN

The work known under the title *Slovo o polku Igoreve* (hereafter *Slovo*),[1] which might best be translated literally into English as *The Discourse of Igor's Campaign*[2] but which Vladimir Nabokov chose to call *The Song of Igor's Campaign*,[3] is generally considered the outstanding product of Old Russian literary civilization.[4] It is fair to say that the *Slovo*, which tells the story of the adventurous but ultimately unsuccessful raid of Prince Igor, the son of Sviatoslav, against the Polovtsians (Kumans) in 1185, has been more exhaustively scrutinized than any other work of Russian literature before Pushkin. Yet it is equally true that no monument of medieval Russian literature has been the object of greater controversy.

Ever since the *editio princeps* of the *Slovo* appeared in 1800, most scholarship dealing with the work has focused on the problem of the work's "authenticity," that is, on whether the *Slovo* is a "genuine" masterpiece of Old Russian literature or an eighteenth-century "forgery" (or modern *pastiche*) in the manner of James Macpherson's fabrication of Ossian's *Fingal* (1761) and *Temora* (1763). Notwithstanding the notable contributions of specialists on both sides of the Atlantic seeking to refute the arguments of the "skeptics," the *Slovo* remains a controversial work still regarded by some scholars as a "deviation" from the mainstream of the Old Russian literary tradition. The notion that the *Slovo* ought to be considered an "anomalous" monument of medieval Russian culture has been grounded in three basic criteria: (1) textological—the only known manuscript, discovered about 1790, perished in 1812 in the fire of Moscow. In other words, because only very recent (i.e., late eighteenth-early nineteenth century) textual evidence of the *Slovo* has survived, doubts have been raised about the existence of earlier documentation; (2) thematic—some critics have argued that the seemingly "secular" and "profane" treatment of events in the *Slovo* and extensive reliance on the oral tradition are in sharp contrast to the ecclesiastic motifs that pervade the literary culture of medieval Russia; (3) rhetorical—the high degree of rhetorical sophistication and dense network of formal devices found in the *Slovo* allegedly are not distinguishing characteristics of other Old Russian literary monuments.

Toward the end of the 1940s, in connection with his new teaching responsibilities at Cornell, Nabokov became deeply involved in problems relating to the *Slovo*.[5] Although he had started to translate the work as early as November 1948, it appears that he did not complete the first version of his translation until 1952, when mimeographed copies of that version began to circulate among students at Harvard, Cornell, and Columbia.[6] Nabokov's desire to produce a new English version of the *Slovo* was clearly motivated by his dissatisfaction with the quality of existing translations. In particular, the most recent attempts by Bernard Guerney (1943) and Samuel Hazzard Cross (1948)[7] were deemed totally inadequate. At the same time, Nabokov did not

seem especially pleased with his own early "utilitarian" attempts to offer an ancient Russian masterpiece to the American reader (*Song* 82). Throughout the 1950s, he continued to revise his translation and work on the annotations and commentary. The results of Nabokov's scholarship, including his "completely revamped" translation (*NWL* 327), were finally published in 1960 in a volume entitled *The Song of Igor's Campaign. An Epic of the Twelfth Century.*[8]

Nabokov's search in the 1950s for the correct English text of the *Slovo* cannot be separated from the larger context of his theory and practice of "poetic translation."[9] It was during the 1950s that Nabokov not only wrote a series of articles in both Russian and English on translation, in which he affirmed the suitability of the "servile path" (i.e., the literal approach),[10] but also engaged in the monumental task of translating and annotating Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin,* for which the translator "sacrificed to total accuracy and completeness of meaning every element of form save the iambic rhythm, the retention of which assisted rather than impaired fidelity."[11] Likewise, in the Foreword to his translation of the *Slovo,* Nabokov declared that he "ruthlessly sacrificed manner to matter" and "attempted to give a literal rendering of the text" (*Song* 17).

As Field has noted, Nabokov's notion of a strictly literal translation was intimately bound up with the idea of providing a full scholarly and critical commentary that would compensate "for the loss of poetry."[12] This particular vision of poetic translation as the correct solution for the *Slovo* had long been in the back of Nabokov's mind. As early as 1944, in his review of Guerney's translation of the *Slovo,* he had written: "Although exquisitely worded, the translation of the celebrated *Lay of the Host of Igor* (presumed to have been composed by an unknown minstrel of unique genius at the end of the twelfth century) is not free from certain slips. Instead of the smooth, lovely Persian miniature that Guerney makes of it, one would have preferred a really scholarly presentation of the thing, fattened on copious notes and enlivened by a thorough discussion of the various readings and obscurities which have been the distress and delight of Russian commentators."[13]

It is important, however, to evaluate the "philological" pose taken here by Nabokov within the framework of his aesthetic. Notwithstanding his alleged preference for a "really scholarly presentation," the notes that accompany the translation of the *Slovo* clearly reveal Nabokov's propensity to verbal play and what Alexandrov has termed his "penchant for self-conscious artifice."[14] As to the text of the translation, even a cursory reading betrays certain "mannerisms of style" which, as Harkins rightly pointed out, "are in evident conflict with his claim to translate literally."[15] It would appear that the decision to sacrifice manner to matter and thereby edify the reader with a "simple" way of translating did not prevent Nabokov from seeking out the allusive and metaphorical shades of individual words,[16] striving to convey the etymological

and pseudoetymological correspondences between Old Russian and English,[17] and employing on occasion a truly "whimsical" mode of expression.[18]

As Clayton has acutely observed, of paramount importance in Nabokov's declaration that only the literal rendering is a "true translation"[19] is not so much his preoccupation with unadorned speech or his concern for the letter of the text as his belief in the impossibility of translating great works of literature.[20] For Nabokov the fact that the *Slovo* is a "magnificent literary masterpiece, half poem, half oration" (*Song* 77) not only justifies the selection of a literal approach to translation but, in the final analysis, takes precedence over all philological matters, that is, all the controversies and conjectures regarding the work's origins and history. Indeed, many of the readings and textual solutions proposed by Nabokov are based not on textological criteria but "artistic" considerations.[21] In his view, what truly counts is the fact that the *Slovo* "shows a subtle balance of parts which attests to deliberate artistic endeavor" and betrays "a constant interplay of themes and echoes" (*Song* 6).

Nabokov is truly at his best not only in his use of certain novel English renderings[22] but also in his penchant for technical minutiae and detection of various punning correspondences,[23] as well as in his comments on poetical formulae and diverse categories of metaphor. Indeed, it is not inappropriate to state that "the most striking innovation of his notes is the lively critical sense"[24] brought to bear on the work of translation and commentary. It is important to note that what Field called Nabokov's "articulated feeling" for the *Slovo*[25] is closely connected not only with the conviction that art and history are frequently at variance but also with the conviction that there exists a fundamental dichotomy between "this pagan poem" and "routine Christian piety which by that time had begun to direct and drain literary art" (*Song* 8). Nowhere is this differentiation more forcefully asserted than in his comparison of the "bard" who produced the "uniquely poetical structure" known as the *Slovo* and the "learned monk" who drew up the account of Igor's campaign found in the Hypatian Chronicle (s.a. 6693 [1185]) (*Song* 5–6). A similarly sharp opposition based on artistic merit is established between the *Zadonshchina* (*The Battle beyond the Don*) and the *Slovo* which, in Nabokov's view, are as different "as sackcloth [and] samite" (*Song* 17). In his commentary on the *Zadonshchina* Nabokov can hardly resist the temptation to allude to the distinction between the artist who can fully appreciate the literary qualities of the *Slovo* and scholars who cannot understand art: "André Mazon, of the Collège de France, has attempted to turn the tables on time and prove that it is The Song [i.e., the *Slovo*] that is an imitation of the *Zadonshchina*. His study [1940] . . . while containing many interesting juxtapositions, is fatally vitiated by his incapacity of artistic appreciation. There is no sin in calling The Song '*une oeuvre récente en forme de pastiche*' (p. 41) but it is meaningless to contrast it as a work '*factice, incohérente et médiocre*' (p. 173) to the *Zadonshchina* which

Mazon describes as '*toujours sincère*' (a phrase used praisefully by people who do not understand art)."[26]

The primacy of art over all other concerns is clearly in evidence in Nabokov's choice of the correct title for his translation. The earlier 1952 version had been entitled *The Discourse of Igor's Campaign,* but this was later discarded because the possible renderings of the term *slovo* ("discourse," "oration," "sermon") all "stress too heavily the didactic character of a work to the exclusion of its poetry."[27] In his attempt to find the designation which would best define the genre (or "literary type") of the *Slovo,* Nabokov then considered the appropriateness of the terms *povest'* ("tale") and *pesn'* ("song"), which the author of the *Slovo* appears to have used in reference to his own work.[28] According to Nabokov, these terms were highly relevant, for the *Slovo* was "indeed a merging of prose and poetry, with apostrophic intonations of oratory mingling with the lyrical strain of melodious lamentations" (*Song* 77). Nonetheless, in his view, the word "tale," which was first used in the title to the translation by Magnus (1915) and later by Cross (1948), also had to be rejected because the *Slovo* was much more than the account of historical events connected with Igor's campaign, his subsequent defeat, and ultimate escape from captivity. Likewise, the term "lay," which Guerney had used in the title to his translation (1943) and which still enjoys wide currency today, was deemed inadequate. After a good deal of hesitation, Nabokov concluded that the first editors of the *Slovo* were correct:[29] the work ought to be classified "as a '*chanson,*' a gest, a heroic song," and therefore it was appropriate to opt for the term "song." Yet in the final analysis his decision to call the *Slovo* a "song" was not so much the result of a scholarly inquiry into the questions of genre, literary characteristics, and composition as a feeling that the term "song" best conveyed the notion of artistic merit, whereas the other terms did not. Nabokov was moved to define the *Slovo* as a "song" "by the final consideration that our author was above all, a poet, and that, as in all literary masterpieces, only inspiration and art really matter."[30]

It is important to note that Nabokov's initial attempts to provide a new translation of the *Slovo* for the American reader coincided with the great critical dispute that had broken out in the 1940s after the publication of Mazon's book *Le Slovo d'Igor'* (Paris, 1940). According to the French Slavist, whose skeptical views were already well known in the 1930s, the *Slovo* was a modern (i.e., eighteenth-century) *pastiche* based on a late version of the *Zadonshchina* which the "forger" may have destroyed in order to conceal the source of his fabrication.[31] To judge from his correspondence with Edmund Wilson (*NWL* 98–99, 216–17), Nabokov was well aware of the call of "patriotic duty" felt by many Russian scholars (especially in the early 1940s) to denounce the "French attack" on the *Slovo* and defend the authenticity of Russia's ancient masterpiece.

The outstanding opponent of the Mazon thesis and the "skeptical school" in the 1940s was Jakobson, whose historiographic and philological views

asserting the authenticity of the *Slovo* were published in the classic study, *La geste du Prince Igor'. Epopée russe du douzième siècle* (New York, 1948).[32] As Picchio has noted, in the monograph, which provides an exhaustive inquiry into the text of the *Slovo,* its relationship to other Old Russian works (especially the account of Igor's raid in the Hypatian Chronicle as well as the *Zadonshchina* and the Kulikovo cycle), and its connections with the oral tradition and mythology, "Jakobson acts not only as an individual polemicist, but also as the representative and the defender of Russian scholarship."[33] His systematic refutation of Mazon's arguments and philological documentation in support of the antiquity of the *Slovo* played a central role, especially in the West, not only in defending the status of an "authentic" masterpiece of Old Russian literature but in reevaluating the entire cultural heritage of medieval Russia.

There is an intimate connection between Nabokov's translation and Jakobson's exhaustive treatment of the *Slovo.* Indeed, it is no accident that Nabokov's first mention (November 1, 1948) of work on the initial draft of his translation of the *Slovo* was followed some three weeks later by a reference to his review—never published—of the 1948 book containing Jakobson's research. In his Foreword to the printed translation of the *Slovo* Nabokov indicates that in his first version he had "followed uncritically Roman Jakobson's recension as published in *'La Geste du Prince Igor'"* (*Song* 82). Although he then notes that he later grew dissatisfied with Jakobson's views,[34] he never specifies the reasons for his decidedly negative evaluation of Jakobson's study.[35] Nor does Nabokov elucidate what he means by "Jakobson's recension"—the first part of the 1948 study contains not only a critical edition of the *Slovo* but also a "reconstruction" of the text "in its original language,"[36] and it is the latter which Cross appears to have used for his translation.[37]

Nabokov's criticism of Jakobson's views must in fact be examined at two levels. At one level, the English translation made by Cross, which attempts to adhere to the letter of Jakobson's text of the *Slovo,* is characterized as a "poor version . . . more or less patched up by the editors."[38] One need only compare Cross's version of the exordium with the relevant portions of Nabokov's translation to find not only significantly different readings but two distinct styles: indeed, it is fair to say that Cross's occasionally stilted and somewhat archaic renderings often are far less readable than the allegedly literal text offered by Nabokov:[39]

> (Cross:) Might it not befit us, brethren, to begin in ancient style the heroic tale of the raid of Igor', of Igor' son of Svjatoslav? Then let this song rather begin according to the events of our time and not after Boyan's invention. (Nabokov): Might it not become us, brothers, to begin in the diction of yore the stern tale of the campaign of Igor, Igor son of Svjatoslav? Let us, however, begin this song in keeping with the happenings of these times and not with the contrivings of Boyan.[40]

> (Cross): O Boyan, thou nightingale of olden times! Would that thou couldst sing of these hosts, flitting, O Nightingale, through the tree of fancy, soaring in thy mind beneath the clouds, weaving songs of praise around the present, dashing out upon the Trojan track across the plains to the mountains! It has behooved his grandson to sing a song of glory to Igor': . . .
> (Nabokov): O Boyan, nightingale of the times of old! *If you* were to trill [your praise of] these troops, while hopping, nightingale, over the tree of thought; [if you were] flying in mind up to the clouds; [if] weaving paeans around *these* times, [*you* were] roving the Troyan Trail, across fields onto hills; then the song to be sung of Igor, that grandson of Oleg [, would be]: . . .[41]
> (Cross): "Brethren and retainers! It were better to be slain than to be led captive. Let us then, my brethren, mount upon our swift horses, that we may catch sight of the blue Don!" The Prince's mind was ablaze with eagerness, and the omen was dimmed by his craving to taste the Great Don.
> (Nabokov): "Brothers and Guards! It is better indeed to be slain than to be enslaved; so let us mount, brothers, upon our swift steeds, and take a look at the blue Don." A longing consumed the prince's mind, and the omen was screened from him by the urge to taste of the Great Don: . . .[42]

At another level, Nabokov's criticism of Jakobson's research on the *Slovo* reveals profound ideological differences that go far beyond the problem of translation and the related question of how best to divide the text into lexical and syntactic units. A common denominator running through all of Jakobson's studies on the *Slovo* was the belief that "to question the authenticity of the [work] indicates an insufficient acquaintance with Old Russian literature," and that "there is nothing in the [*Slovo*] which might contradict what we know about Old Russian literature."[43] Here as elsewhere in his writings, Jakobson's real aim was to place the *Slovo* within the mainstream of Old Russian literature and to dispel the view that the work was at variance with the rhetorical patrimony of medieval Russia. Indeed, it was his belief that mastery of the Old Russian literary heritage would unlock the "semantic key" to the *Slovo.*[44] For Nabokov, instead, the *Slovo* had very few connections with the main body of Old Russian literature: "[There is] a striking, obvious, almost palpable difference in artistic texture that exists between the [*Slovo*] and such remnants of Kievan literature as have reached us across the ages. Had only those chronicles and sermons, and testaments, and humdrum lives of saints been preserved, the Kievan era would have occupied a very modest nook in the history of medieval European literature; but as things stand, one masterpiece not only lords it over Kievan letters but rivals the greatest European poems of its day" (*Song* 13). Here, of course, Nabokov was relying on a longlasting critical tradition that offered a decidedly negative assessment of the Old Russian cultural heritage.[45] In other words, the *Slovo* had to be considered a

"deviation" from the mainstream of the Old Russian literary tradition precisely because it exhibited great rhetorical sophistication.

Another crucial distinction between Jakobson and Nabokov seems to have involved the question of authenticity in relation to the "spirit of the Russian Ossian" that had appeared in the reports of M.M. Kheraskov and N.M. Karamzin (1797) and in the preface to the *editio princeps* (1800). According to Jakobson, however, no two literary works could be more different than Macpherson's fabrication and the *Slovo*: "In the atmosphere of the declining classicism and of the dominant pre-romantic trend, the appealing medieval poetry was the sentimental, descriptive, and univalent hoax of Macpherson, the opposite of the absolutely non-sentimental, non-descriptive, and deliberately ambiguous [*Slovo*]."[46] Thus, in his view, the first editors and commentators had been confronted with the necessity of Ossianizing the text of the *Slovo* in order to make it accessible to the taste of the epoch. The task of Jakobson's scholarly enterprise, therefore, was to restore the medieval text of the *Slovo* and cleanse it of Ossianisms and modernisms superimposed on the work by its editors and commentators.

Although Nabokov, who based his conclusions on "considerations of historical perspective" (*Song* 13), also accepted an early dating for the work and detected in the modern Russian version prepared by the first editors "all kinds of inaccuracies, pseudoclassical paraphrases and glaring blunders" (*Song* 3), it might seem that the "frail shoulders of insufficient scholarship" were insufficient to drive away "certain eerie doubts" about the possibility of fraud (*Song* 14). It is no accident that in his notes to the translation Nabokov occasionally compared the readings of the *Slovo* with Macpherson's *Fingal* and *Temora* (*Song* 88, 97–98, 103–104, 105–106, 109–10, 113–14, 123, 125–26, 131). Nonetheless, according to Nabokov, the poetical formulae in the *Slovo* that strikingly resemble those in Macpherson's Ossian were significant not because they provided proof that an eighteenth-century Russian emulated Macpherson but because they allowed us to conjecture that "through the mist of Scandinavian sagas certain bridges or ruins of bridges may be distinguished linking Scottic-Gaelic romances with Kievan ones."[47]

If one considers Nabokov's comments on Ossian within the context of his views on art and translation, the distinction in attitudes to the *Slovo* held by the two Russian émigrés becomes exceedingly clear. In seeking to continue the work of early Russian scholarship, Jakobson emerged as the patriotic defender of the cultural heritage of medieval Russia. He was obliged above all to prove the authenticity (i.e., the early dating)[48] of the *Slovo* and its connection with other works of Old Russian literature and thereby offer to the Western reader a complete reevaluation of Old Russia's place in the European cultural community. From Nabokov's point of view, however, it would seem that what might be perceived as Jakobson's "patriotic stance" and his preoccupation with the issue of authenticity somehow took attention away from purely artistic concerns.[49] One need only recall Mazon's above-cited remarks on the *Slovo*—

which are presented in the notes to the translation—to appreciate fully the real underpinnings of Nabokov's disagreement with Jakobson. It appears that, perhaps surprisingly, Nabokov was not particularly disturbed by Mazon's reference to the *Slovo* as "*une oeuvre récente de pastiche*"—the point of departure for the Mazon–Jakobson *querelle*—but he reacted very negatively to the French Slavist's evaluation of the work as "*factice, incohérente et médiocre.*"[50] In the latter case, Mazon's remarks on the *Slovo* were totally unacceptable since, "as in all literary masterpieces, only inspiration and art really matter" (*Song* 77).

Harvey Goldblatt

NOTES

1. The complete title of the *editio princeps* of the work (Moscow, 1800) is *Slovo o pl"ku Igoreve, Igorja syna Svjat"slavlja, vnuka Ol'gova.* According to some scholars, the title, as found in the *codex unicus* available to the first editors of the *Slovo*, may have been added by a copyist or adapter at a relatively late stage in the textual history (see Adrianova-Peretts, p. 45).
2. For the English term "discourse" used to render the Old Russian *slovo*, see fns. 3 and 27 below. See also Nabokov, *The Song of Igor's Campaign*, pp. 76–77. Hereafter, references to Nabokov's translation will be given as "*Song*," followed by page numbers.
3. On Nabokov's justification for using the term "song" in his title, see *Song*, pp. 76–77. Cf. the title to the translation in modern Russian made by the first editors: *Pesn'* [i.e., "Song"] *o pokhode Igorja, syna Svjatoslavova, vnuka Ol'gova.* In 1952 Nabokov had entitled an earlier version of his translation *The Discourse of Igor's Campaign* (see Field, 1967, 270–71).
4. The term "Old Russian literature" is a conventional historiographic formula that is generally used to refer to all forms of literary activity in "Old Russia" from the eleventh century to the reign of Peter the Great. Yet an increasing number of scholars have come to question the suitability of the qualifier "Old Russian" for the literary patrimony of Kievan Rus', which represents a cultural heritage belonging not only to the Russians but also to the Ukrainians and Belorussians. On the "Russocentric approach"—which most certainly conditioned Nabokov's evaluation of the *Slovo*—see Goldblatt, pp. 12–14.
5. *Song* 82; Boyd, 1991, p. 136.
6. Boyd, 1991, p. 217.
7. Guerney, pp. 7–33. Cross's translation of the *Slovo* is found in Grégoire, Jakobson, and Szeftel, pp. 151–79.
8. For a review of the volume, see Harkins.
9. On the term "poetic translation" as applied to Nabokov, see Clayton, pp. 90–94.
10. See Nabokov, "The Servile Path," Field, 1967, p. 269.
11. Nabokov, "The Servile Path," p. 97. Cf. Nabokov's translation of *Eugene Onegin*, vol. 1, p. x.
12. Field, 1967, p. 269.
13. Nabokov, "Cabbage Soup and Caviar," p. 93. Cited in Field, 1967, pp. 269–70.

14. Alexandrov, 1991, p. 3.
15. Harkins.
16. See, for example, his note on the Old Russian adjective *shizyi* (line 17), which is usually translated as "blue-grey" but which Nabokov renders in a quite different way: "Smoky: this seems the simplest way of translating *shiziy* (now *siziy*), smoke-colored, dove-gray, slate-blue, the dimness of dusk, the tint of distance" (*Song* 85).
17. See, for instance, Nabokov's translation of *div* (line 118) as "daeva," and *za shelomianem* (line 196) as "behind the culmen."
18. Harkins.
19. *Eugene Onegin*, vol. 1, p. viii.
20. Clayton, p. 99.
21. See, for example, his remarks concerning lines 51–70: "I follow Sobolevski and other scholars . . . in assuming that a page was transposed by mistake in the lost manuscript book from which the first edition and archival apograph took their text. I do this from considerations of artistic structure, not of historical sequence as given in the [Hypatian] Chronicle" (*Song* 87). Cf. Jakobson's quite different interpretation (which instead is based on the account of Igor's raid found in that chronicle) in Jakobson, 1966, p. 150.
22. See, for instance, Nabokov's translation of *veshchii*, which occurs five times in the *Slovo*, as "vatic." In an earlier draft Nabokov had used the term "seer" to characterize the bard known as Boyan (Field, 1967, p. 271). Yet the word "seer" does not provide a totally adequate translation of Old Russian *veshchii*, which combines the semantic fields of magic and poetry. Consequently, in the final version of his translation Nabokov opted for the qualifier "vatic" (cf. Latin *vates*), which implies that originally the *poietes* ("poet") was also an *epodos* ("magician"). See Barsov, vol. 3, p. 135.
23. See, for example, *Song* 89–90 (line 59), where a connection is made between *rishcha v tropu Troianiu* ("roving the Troyan trail") and the *Tropaeum Traiani* ("Trojan's Trophy"). Nabokov concludes that "the Roman emperor [Trajan] and the Russian god [Troyan] seem to have got hopelessly entangled by the time the [*Slovo*] was composed" (p. 90). It is interesting to note that in his commentary on the adjective *trojan'*, which occurs four times in the *Slovo*, Nabokov ignores a possible reference to Troy. For more on the motif of Troy, see Jakobson, 1966, esp. 238–42; Picchio, 1985; Sokolova.
24. Field, 1967, p. 271.
25. Ibid., p. 272.
26. *Song* 82. Cf. Goldblatt, pp. 17–18.
27. *Song* 76. Cf. Field, 1967, 270–71. Although the term *slovo* implies a connection with an oratorical performance, it does not necessarily refer to a text that was intended to be delivered as an oration and is most probably intended to convey the notion of a general address or exposition (cf. Greek *logos*). One might wonder whether Nabokov's remarks on the "didactic character" of the work offer an objective inquiry into the nature and compositional scheme of the *Slovo* as it has come down to us. In other words, one might conclude that the use of the term *slovo* in the title (see fn. 1 above) may be connected with the prominent role played by the work's central section, in which one finds an *oratorical* response to the account of historical events connected with Igor's raid against the Polovtsians. For more on the problem of genre and on the possibility of viewing the *Slovo* as an example of epideictic oratory, see Eremin, 1956 and 1966.

28. On the use of these terms within the context of the exordium to the *Slovo*, see Picchio, 1978, pp. 395–99.
29. The first edition of the *Slovo* came out in a volume entitled *Iroicheskaia pesn'* [i.e., "Heroic Song"] *o pokhode na polovtsov*. . . (Moscow, 1800).
30. *Song* 77. However, if one accepts Riccardo Picchio's persuasive conjectural reading *nachati siiu povest'* (instead of the first editors' *nachati zhe sia t"i pesni*), it would seem that the term *pesn'* is used in the exordium to the *Slovo* only in relation to Boyan's fantastic (i.e., poetic) mode of speech, which functions as the countervoice to the exposition of the narrator (see Picchio, 1978, pp. 397–99). Cf. Smolitsky.
31. See Fennell and Stokes, esp. pp. 192–93.
32. Grégoire, Jakobson, and Szeftel, pp. 5–96, 150–178, 235–362. Reprinted with some changes in Jakobson, 1966, pp. 106–300.
33. Picchio, 1977, p. 341.
34. In 1957 Nabokov withdrew from a joint project with Jakobson on the *Slovo*, allegedly because of "political" differences (see Boyd, 1991, p. 311). See also fns. 35 and 49 below.
35. Here, of course, one cannot discount the significance of the strained personal relations between Jakobson and Nabokov in the 1950s; see Field, 1986, 237–38; Boyd, 1991, 215–16, 303.
36. As to the distinction between "critical edition" and "textural reconstruction" in Jakobson's work on the *Slovo*, Picchio has stated the following: "Once again, philological precision prevents Jakobson from mingling what pertains to the concrete field of textual criticism [i.e., a critical edition] with what pertains instead to the domain of hypotheses beyond the limits of textual documentation [i.e., a linguistic reconstruction]" (Picchio, 1977, p. 341).
37. In the 1948 volume Jakobson's "reconstruction" is presented with a facing English translation by Cross (Grégoire, Jakobson, and Szeftel, pp. 151–79).
38. Although differences between the two translations do in fact exist, one wonders to what extent Cross's version might have relied on Jakobson's modern Russian translation of the *Slovo* (Grégoire, Jakobson, and Szeftel, pp. 181–200). For more on Nabokov's negative evaluation of Cross's competence in Russian, see Field, 1986, 237; Boyd, 1991, 69–70.
39. In the Foreword to his volume, Nabokov does not make mention of the Guerney translation, probably because it strayed so far from the letter of the Old Russian text.
40. Note that in the opening sentence containing a rhetorical question both Cross and Nabokov attribute an accusative singular function to the Old Russian genitive plural *trudnyikh povestii* (cf. Jakobson's modern Russian translation with a plural form: *nachat . . . mnogotrudnye rasskazy* [Grégoire, Jakobson, and Szeftel, 181; *nachat' . . . tiazhkie rasskazy* [Jakobson, 1966, p. 165]). Nabokov's "stern"—which he states "connotes not only 'work' but also 'grief,' 'pain,' 'endeavor' and the hardships of war" (*Song* 83)—is certainly preferable to Cross's "heroic" (which differs significantly from both the Old Russian text and Jakobson's translation). The Old Russian adjective *trudnyi* lays stress here on the laborious, painful, and sorrowful character of the old stories about Igor's raid. This characterization relies on the subject matter of these stories and does not necessarily point to any particular quality connected with the work's style.

41. In addition to the obvious stylistic differences found here, one encounters two important interpretative distinctions based on longlasting critical traditions (see Adrianova-Peretts, pp. 60–61). (1) Cross, following Jakobson's lead, may well be linking the qualifier *trojan'* with the motif of Troy (see Grégoire, Jakobson, Szeftel, p. 101–102; Jakobson, 1966, pp. 166–67, 238–42, esp. fn. 112), while Nabokov opts for the Slavic deity Troyan and its possible "entanglement" with the Roman emperor Trajan (see fn. 23 above). (2) In the final words of the textual fragment, Cross interprets Old Russian *vnuku togo* as the logical subject of the impersonal verb form *peti bylo* (with *togo* referring to Boyan); in other words, it is a "grandson" of Boyan who would "sing a song of glory to Igor'." Nabokov, instead, relying on the reading found in the *editio princeps—vnuku togo (Olga)*—suggests that *vnuku* is in apposition to *Igoriu*, that is, that a song would "be sung of Igor', that grandson of Oleg." Although the Cross–Jakobson interpretation seems more persuasive—the word *Olga* placed in parentheses in the *editio princeps* appears to be an interpolation, probably made by the first editors, based on what is found in the title to the work (i.e., *vnuka Ol'gova* "grandson of Oleg")—the fact is that Cross's translation is in need of emendation: *vnuku* should be translated not as "grandson" but as "offspring," for it is not an actual relative but rather a *spiritual* descendant (i.e., a follower or imitator) of Boyan who would sing a song for Igor' (cf. Shchepkina, pp. 73–74). As to the reading *oba poly* (or preferably *obapoly*) *sego vremeni*, which might best be translated as "both aspects of that very time (i.e., Igor's time)," rather than "around the present" (Cross) or "around *these* times" (Nabokov), see Picchio, 1978, pp. 406–408.
42. The fact that this passage may have been damaged in the process of textual transmission is best evidenced by the difficulty which modern editors and translators have encountered in their interpretations of the final sentence. Nabokov's translation of the sentence is dependent upon a textual emendation which regards "longing" as the subject of the third-person singular transitive verb form "consumed" and interprets the substantive "mind" as the direct object of the verb. Picchio, 1978, pp. 404–406, has suggested that the final sentence becomes clear and logical only if one inverts the last two syntactic segments. Thus, in the same way that longing to taste the great Don "burned up" Igor's mind, so his passion created a spiritual barrier between him and sign given to him by God (i.e., the eclipse).
43. Jakobson, 1966, p. 49. These statements were made as early as 1932 in a review of André Vaillant's study on South Slavic epics. Jakobson's point of departure was Mazon's notion that the *Slovo* was "a text that remains suspicious despite the efforts of several generations of scholars" and the French Slavist's plea that Russian philologists "courageously present the vital question of authenticity or at least the antiquity of the poem."
44. For more on Jakobson's beliefs, see Picchio, 1977, pp. 335–37; Goldblatt, 1987, pp. 17–18.
45. See, for example, Pushkin's celebrated remarks, in his "O nichtozhestsve literatury russkoi" ("On the Insignificance of Russian Literature"), written in 1834: "For a long time, Russia remained a stranger to Europe. . . . Europe was flooded with a remarkable number of poems, legends, satires, romances, mysteries, etc., whereas our archives and libraries, with the exception of the chronicles, offer hardly any nourishment for the curiosity of the researcher. Some tales and songs, continuously renewed by the oral tradition, have preserved half-effaced features of the national character, and the

Discourse of Igor's Campaign towers as a lonely monument in the desert of our literature" (Pushkin, 1949, vol. 7, pp. 306–307).

46. Jakobson, 1966, p. 384.
47. *Song* 12. One should remember, in this regard, that a central motif of Jakobson's writings is that the *Slovo* was by no means an isolated phenomenon and should be studied against the backdrop of the literary trends in Europe in the twelfth century.
48. It should be pointed out that *both* Jakobson and Nabokov seem to discuss the issue of dating the *Slovo* without considering fully the peculiar conditions that affected the process of textual transmission of medieval Russian works. Indeed, one might wonder whether concepts such as "authenticity" and "original text" can be applied to a textual tradition for which one cannot proceed from the assumption of a unified text and a "closed tradition" (i.e., a process of faithful textual transmission). Given the possibility of an "open" textual tradition (i.e., a process of textual reshaping in accordance with new needs), it may well be that the text of the *Slovo* as it has come down to us is the result of a literary compilation, that is, a later reelaboration of preexistent textual material (see Picchio, 1991).
49. In a strange way, it is almost as if Nabokov implicitly sought to link Jakobson with Soviet scholars whose "Marxist scholastics and nationalist emotions . . . tend to transform modern essays on [the *Slovo*] into exuberant hymns to the Motherland" (*Song* 13). For Nabokov's suspicions about Jakobson's political views, see Boyd, 1991, p. 311. It is noteworthy that in a letter to Nabokov, dated December 2, 1948, wherein is described a 1943 session of the "*Ecole libre*" devoted to a discussion of Mazon's attack on the *Slovo*—and at which Jakobson played a prominent role—Edmund Wilson alludes to the fundamental distinction between Russian defenders of the work's authenticity, for whom the question had become a patriotic issue, and Nabokov's attitude: "It was at the moment when the Russians were standing up to the Germans after the ignoble flop of the French, and I was struck by the Russian propensity for using events in the literary world as pretexts for creating issues in connection with current politics (which you seem to have reacted against by leaning in the other direction at an angle of forty-five degrees and denying that literature has anything to do with social institutions)," *NWL* 217.
50. Mazon, pp. 41, 173.

SPEAK, MEMORY

Conclusive Evidence (1951), *Drugie berega* (*Other Shores*, 1954), *Speak, Memory* (1966), which are versions of each other, constitute one manifold book, and a central one in Nabokov's *oeuvre*. One should first remember that autobiography is the main and central genre in Russian classical literature: Aksakov, Turgenev, Goncharov, Tolstoy, Bunin. Dostoevsky is the only exception, and he is very conscious of that, as he reveals in the epilogue of *The Adolescent* where he explains that he has contrived to describe the chaotic nature of

destroyed and accidental families, but that he would much prefer to be the chronicler of aristocratic biographies, harmonious ones enriched by remembrances of "nests of gentle folk." The Russian autobiography was not heir to a more ancient genre—that of the "confession," which came from Augustine, and was renewed by Rousseau in modern times. It was instead the poetical autobiography of the Russian nobleman who remembers the lost paradise of his "double culture": aristocratic culture and intimacy with nature (and the people, as part of that nature). Tolstoy is the only nineteenth-century Russian writer who has, in a way, practiced both genres: Rousseau's, and, say, Aksakov's. This is due to a peculiarity of Tolstoy's: his double nature, as a man of nature, an aristocratic companion to the Russian peasant or the free Cossack, but also as a "Christian pilgrim," avidly seeking his own salvation. There is of course nothing similar in Nabokov, who is not a Christian, nor a pagan either, but some sort of tentative Oriental thinker, a mind tempted by the seeking of repetitive patterns in our lives that lead to the idea of metempsychosis, or at least some sort of eternal return.

That is the main difference between the philosophical underground of his biography and the Russian classical model. Nabokov's interest lie in patterns, "secret themes concealed within a visible destiny," recurrent rhythms in life's structure, and the pleasure that arises from the very fact of recognizing those patterns, which are hidden in the text of reality as a mimetic butterfly is concealed in the structure of the vegetable world. The poetry of memory, or more exactly, the poetry of the phenomenon of remembering, is at the core of many major twentieth-century texts, such as Marcel Proust's masterpiece, *Remembrance of Things Past*, on which we have commentaries by Nabokov himself.

At the end of chapter 3 of *Speak, Memory* Nabokov evokes a rather unexpected ancestor of his own endeavor to remember from afar a Russian aristocratic childhood: the well-known French novels of "Mme de Ségur, née Rostopchine," a "Frenchified" version, as he puts it, of a Russian childhood in the surroundings of a half magical, half ridiculous "*vie de château*" *à la russe*.[1] The allusion to *Les malheurs de Sophie* (*The Sorrows of Sophie*) is complicated by a very "Nabokovian" elaboration of different layers of memory: in 1908, Uncle Ruka (Vasiliy Rukavishnikov, his mother's brother) finds a copy of the book in the house of his sister, and ecstatically identifies a passage he had loved in his own childhood. Years later, the narrator echoes his uncle's delight when he finds in his turn, in a "chance nursery," beloved pages of the same book, and goes "through the same agony and delight that my uncle did," but "with an additional burden—the recollection I have of him, reliving his childhood with the help of those very books" (*SM* 76). So Mme de Ségur is a sort of mock key to unlocking the paradise of lost childhood: she, too, had to fight against the distortion of exile ("Frenchifying"), she, too, looked at those aristocratic childhoods in Russian mansions as the very image of paradise on earth. But, of course, she is "an awful combination of preciosity and vulgarity" (76), in

other words, an example of that celebrated "poshlost'" to which Nabokov has written so many mock hymns, especially when considering Gogol. Always hiding emotion under many strata of games, devices, and veils, Nabokov is not writing a "confession," not at all, that just is not done, and it is not even very appropriate for an artist. However, at rare intervals a sense of hidden suffering shows through his devices, and makes us aware that the recollection of the past is not only an artistic game: the intensity of the exercise is alluded to in the same chapter 3, just after the mention of Mme de Ségur. His uncle is sitting on a leathern couch in the classroom: "A sense of security, of well-being, of summer warmth pervades my memory. That robust reality makes a ghost of the present" (77). So, as memory resurrects the mirror of the past, the miserable present fades away, miserable because it lacks the gloss, the "well-being" of lost paradise. This is one of the rare passages where emotion is implicit, and Nabokov gets strangely near to Goncharov's Oblomov in the eponymous novel and his paradise of "Oblomovka." Oblomov ends as a sort of Buddhist saint, accepting self-deprecation and a sort of natural evanescence that is similar to some oriental exercises in spirituality. Nabokov concludes the chapter with: "Everything is as it should be, nothing will ever change, nobody will ever die" (77).

The sense of dim suffering is due to the disappearance of that "well-being": the Russia described, summoned to life by memory has disappeared for ever, just as Athens and Rome have (a comparison made in the Russian variant of chapter 9 [*Drugie berega* 165], and absent from the English one), which gives a sort of epic grandeur to what may at first glance seem a whimsical, incomplete recollection of his childhood by a strange and not very sympathetic adolescent from a rich family. Actually, the autobiography encompasses not only childhood and adolescence, but the first thirty-nine years of the narrator's life. Indeed, its real range is from one parenthood—that of Nabokov's parents, who managed to provide him and his siblings such an excellent, diversified, luxurious, and well-thought-out education—to his own parenthood, when he and his wife Véra take care of their son, stroll with him through innumerable parks that unify into one "western" park, a faint duplication of the park in Vyra, and apply the new rules of hygiene for children which were not yet elaborated when his own anglophilic parents brought him up. At one point, when the narrator comes to his son Dmitri and describes that new pedagogical epos in a completely different context, the addressee of the text suddenly turns out to be his wife. Otherwise the presence of a reader, who is evoked, addressed, often teased, is permanent. In other words, *Speak, Memory* is Nabokov's dialogue with his own self in the presence of the reader. Rousseau, too, addresses his reader, but in a pathetic way, and in order to emphasize his sincerity. For Nabokov, the reader is the purchaser of the text, a person with prejudices whom it is fun to deceive. Nabokov also feigns being afraid of boring him with incredibly minute details, especially when it comes to butterflies. Indeed, he describes a general lepidopterophobia, of which he gives amusing examples

(including La Bruyère in his *Characters*), and of which he has been a victim all his life. When enumerating the synesthetic details of his colored alphabet, Nabokov knows he may weary his reader. He concedes in Russian: "I might enrage the most complaisant reader" (*Drugie berega* 26); and in English he writes: "I hasten to complete my list before I am interrupted" (*SM* 35). In other words, the present author is always here, grumbling against the Soviet dictatorship or, worse still, the Western veneration of that dictatorship. He is present with his mood, his allusions to future novels and their heroes, many of whom come from his childhood. When he speaks of the "large, gloomy, eminently bourgeois" Berlin flats, one of which was occupied by his parents at the beginning of the twenties, he acknowledges: "I have let [them] to . . . many émigré families in my novels and short stories" (*SM* 49). He mentions many posterior uses of that autobiographical material, sometimes in a cruel mood of vengeance: Kretschmar, the hero of *Laughter in the Dark*, has been so named after an entomologist who deprived the young Nabokov of the pleasure of discovering a new species of butterfly because he had already described it himself (134)—an amusing and not very malicious device.

The English version is full of explanations of Russian words and realia that have disappeared from the Russian text. An example is when Nabokov explains to his reader that in his English commentary to *Eugene Onegin* he has introduced a new English word for "*cheryomuha*" (translated as "bird cherry," which is so vague as to be practically meaningless, as he says in his Commentary), which is "racemosa," and which rhymes with mimosa (*Drugie berega* 55; *SM* 69). The permanent movement of memory from present to past and from past to present is also underlined by Nabokov's bombastic addresses to Mnemosyne and more familiar challenges to the reader. That ironic rhetoric, intertwined with familiarity, and the numerous comments on his own novels and other texts, as if he were just chatting with us, create a vivid sort of oral, slightly pedantic and snobbish manner, a variety of what the Russian formalists call "skaz." Sometimes that skaz manner hides emotion, as when the narrator explains that things are happening, as he says in Russian, at the longitude of one hundred East from the end of his pen, a humorous way of underlining the distance between the exiled writer and his home country. The addressee may be the "careless foreigner" who is bombastically rebuked for thinking that any Russian émigré regrets mainly his lost money, or the "delegate-reader" (*Drugie berega* 136), sent, as it were, into the distant past, a sort of Far Past variant of the Far East, in order to check the authenticity of the narrator's remarks.

In his preface to *Speak, Memory*, the author has given, with evident pleasure, the arch-complicated story of the first journal publications of different chapters of the book (first chapter 5, written in French, and published in *Mesures* in 1936, translated into English and published in America in 1943; then chapters 3 to 10 published in America from 1948 to 1951). The first English version of the memoir, baptized *Conclusive Evidence* (1951) was republished as *Speak, Memory* (after *Speak, Mnemosyne* had been rejected by

the publisher). Conclusive evidence "of my having existed," says Nabokov, but that title was dismissed because it "suggested a mystery story" (*SM* 11). Then the book was translated into Russian during a stay in Arizona in 1953, and this in turn led to a complete revision of the text: chapter 11 was dropped because it treated the birth of Nabokov's first poems, something that he had already described in *The Gift*, and which the Russian reader knew; paragraphs were also abridged, and their order was changed in certain chapters. Moreover, the Russian translation induced a new effort of memory ("I tried to do something about the amnesic defects of the original" [*SM* 12]): as the author explains, "by means of intense concentration, the neutral smudge might be forced to come into beautiful focus." Finally, the family had demanded some corrections of errors in the dates and other details. "This re-Englishing of a Russian re-version of what had been an English re-telling of Russian memories in the first place, proved to be a diabolical task, but some consolation was given me by the thought that such multiple metamorphosis, familiar to butterflies, had not been tried by any human before" (*SM* 12–13).

This claim is not exaggerated, and the game with linguistic, psychological, and trivial realities of different countries is one of the main pleasures of the American Nabokov. *Speak, Memory* is the axis of the existential metamorphosis of Nabokov. In his eagerness to fool the reader, Nabokov adds complicated riddles and puzzles, such as those surrounding his real date of birth: this involves the difference between the "old style" calendar in Russia and the "new style" calendar in Europe, the fact that the gap between them was twelve days in the nineteenth century and thirteen in the twentieth, and that he was born on the eve of the twentieth. But that calendric difference is just an allegory: the two worlds never fit totally. Nabokov claims very loudly that he is no Conrad. In fact, he has not changed languages, he has mixed the two, not only lexically (he does it also in all his English texts, more so in *Ada* and *Look at the Harlequins!* than in earlier works), but mainly musically, weaving together the two "harmonies" (he likes the archaic Russian word for "harmony," which is "*lad*"). "Russian and English had existed in my mind as two worlds detached from one another," says Vadim Vadimovich in *Look at the Harlequins!* (124). The foreword to *Drugie berega* explains: "pamiat' byla nastroena na odin lad—muzykal'no nedogovorennyi, russkii,—a naviazyvalsia ei drugoi lad, angliiskii i obstoiatel'nyi" (8; "memory was attuned to another harmony—the musically reticent, Russian one—when another harmony imposed itself, the English, more circumstantial one"). This contrast, this fight inside the musicality of the text, this linguistic counterpoint is the very core of *Speak, Memory*, and Nabokov manages to make it felt in both versions, the English one, where he often comments on Russian *realia*, and also the Russian one, where he comments on his English version, on the compositional difficulties that he experienced, and on "the interspatial contact" established between the two realms. A stylized profile on one side, a plain face on the other one (the Russian one!)—English italics opposed to Russian capital letters.

A complete analysis of that dual text would need a full book. We know that the Nabokov archives in the Library of Congress contain some rejected unfinished chapters.[2] That fact shows that a complete study of this original work is yet to come.

As a conscious "formalist," Nabokov fools us with some well known devices, such as the "retardation" of the exposition until chapter 8: "My brother and I were born in St Petersburg . . ." (*SM* 153). *Speak, Memory* is not as deceptive as *Look at the Harlequins!*, Nabokov's last novel, but it is as true to life as is a poem. Its links with the rest of Nabokov's fiction (with *Mary*, *Laughter in the Dark*, *The Gift*, and *Glory*) are proof that there is no substantial difference between truth (Goethe's "Wahrheit"), and poetry (Goethe's "Dichtung") in this autobiographical text and in the great fictional texts. Yet in this text we probably get a maximum of information on the childhood, parents, household, exile, the Cambridge years, the Berlin sojourn. Names of major personages are changed: the Tamara of *Speak, Memory*, or Mashen'ka (Mary) of the eponymous novel, was in reality Valentina Shul'gina. Amorous life is only alluded to. The author loudly and insistently denies Freud's interpretation of sexuality, mocks his theory for reducing our inner life to the repetition of schemes from ancient Greek mythology, and ridicules Havelock Ellis's description of an orgiastic prewar Russia, where all women and high school students were engaged in collective priapic enterprises. (By contrast, in *Look at the Harlequins!* Nabokov will allude to a precocious sexual initiation, in the style of a "ribald novella.")

The structure of *Speak, Memory* is many levelled. The narration develops from the "second baptism" of the narrator (21; chap. 1), which entails his becoming aware of time, to the portrait of the narrator's son, his love for speed, symbolized by trains, and symbolizing time and death itself (chap. 15 in English, 14 in Russian). It encompasses various symmetries: chapter 2 is a portrait of the mother, chapter 9 a portrait of the father. There is an obvious symmetry between the chapter on "English Education" (English governesses) and the one on "Russian Education" (Russian tutors). The chapter on ancestors (outrageously pedantic) is centered on the "portrait of my uncle" (Ruka), and evokes Töpffer's *Library of My Uncle*. The chapter on butterflies is no less provocatively pedantic, and so is the chapter on chess and chess problems (a passion and a livelihood in emigration), and the passage on football and the magnificent solitude of the goalie (267–68). These are parts of the text meant to irritate. Zinaida Shakhovskaia is right when she writes of the snobbish egocentrism of the book, of the class pride, the nearly total ignorance of other social worlds, the faceless domestics, the absence of real peasants.[3] Nabokov makes no demagogic effort to please the public. He has a "pathological indifference to politics, major ideas in minor minds" (*LATH* 24), that is to say, to social conventions and social hypocrisy.

The central chapter, as in *The Gift*, is probably the one about his father, and the projected duel with Suvorin, which did not take place because Suvorin

apologized. This passage sends us back to the core of Russian classical literature, which has made of the duel a main theme. "In the almost hallucinatory state that our snow-muffled ride engendered, I refought all the famous duels a Russian boy knew so well. . . . No Russian writer of any repute had failed to describe *une rencontre*, a hostile meeting, always of course of the classical *duel à volonté* type (not the ludicrous back-to-back-march-face-about-bang-bang performances of movie and cartoon fame)"(191). This is not only a cultural quotation in the life of the father, and a literary one in the text of the son, but it also proves to be a prefiguration of what will happen in Berlin, "a certain night in 1922" (193), when the writer's father was killed as he shielded the political figure Miliukov from the bullets of two Russian rightist extremists. Events are always to be read a second time, and receive their real meaning during that repetition. Exile is a repetition of life, a bit less real, and a lot more tragic. Heraldry, lepidopterology, chess problems irritate readers and companions of life because they seem useless. They are not here fortuitously, as they are not fortuitous in the author's life: the last chapter reveals the meaning of the sequence: chess, butterflies, art. Pursuit of all three is useless and comes not from toil, but from laziness. In his amusing conclusion, Nabokov rewrites both the Bible and Karl Marx: the world, which is an art object, was created on a Sunday, during a period of rest, and the right motto of art is "Toilers of the world, disband!" (298). Actually Nabokov is quite aware that art for the Ancients was a product of "*otium*" (leisure), and his theory of art, in a text so emphatically placed under the auspices of the muse Mnemosyne, is far nearer to concepts of the Ancients than to the pathos of *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake). Art comes from a lameness of existence: exile is that lameness, exile in time, and exile in space. Refraction in memory creates art. Russian literature with its gorgeous vermilion shields coming from *The Song of Igor's Campaign* began its mysterious life in the author's imagination in lonely Cambridge, as if only a process of separation could set creativity into motion. Even in erotic life, Tamara and the young narrator are engaged, during their whole winter in St. Petersburg, in "exercises of separation" (234–38).

Useless from a utilitarian point of view, art is existentially necessary. Time and its servant Memory (Mnemosyne) spin the very thread of our life. The fabric of *Speak, Memory* is woven of symbolic details that become mythological in most cases. As in epics, comets and eclipses play a sacred role in childhood, and many coincidences which appear when destinies develop are themselves magical. ("Magic" and "magical" are words that Nabokov multiplies in the Russian version). Coincidences abound, as for example the double episode with matches, first the game that General Kuropatkin plays on the child's bed, and much later his re-appearance, dressed as a peasant, during his flight from the Bolsheviks when he fortuitously asks Nabokov's father for a match, before each recognizes the other (27). Or the strident whistle which, suddenly, conjures the souvenir linked with "Vasiliy Martïnovich" (28). Details come back with the extreme precision of a landscape looked at through the wrong

end of binoculars, and they act as an open sesame for Memory. The veil on his mother's hat, which provokes a sensation of cold on his cheek (*Drugie berega* 31; *SM* 38), or the handbook of English grammar coming back to memory as distinctly as the alphabet in an optician's shop are but two examples: "they now drift with a slow-motioned slouch across the remotest backdrop of memory" (*SM* 80). It also happens that objects contain not only the past, as does Proust's madeleine, or the shriek of swallows in Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, but also the future: such is the diamond on his mother's finger, with its content of "a whole period of émigré life for which that ring was to pay" (81). His father's fortune and library had disappeared in the turmoil of revolution, but "queer little remnants of it kept cropping up abroad" (182). Two books will be found by mere chance in émigré life, one in a peddler's case in Berlin, the other one in the New York Public Library (182). A tunnel leads to the Versailles park or the Berlin Tiergarten from the ancestral Vyra park in Russia, and back from the parks in the American West to a special tree at Vyra (222–23), as if mysterious, or spiritualistic tricks were animating the time-space of human life.

Nostalgia is a motor of that magical fancy. "The break in my own destiny affords me in retrospect a syncopal kick that I would not have missed for worlds," writes Nabokov ironically (*SM* 250). Actually, memory is the "unreal estate" that Nabokov the émigré, a displaced artist, takes with him, instead of the wondrous and voluminous baggage that his family used to take when they would travel to Biarritz with tutors, maids, and servants for summer vacations. From Biarritz to Menton and St. Nazaire the sea is also a link, as if those islands of memory were an archipelago on the Ocean of the Ancients, and the successive generations of Nabokovs are trying to glue together the chips of an ancient earthenware scattered on the beaches of Oblivion: "I do not doubt that among those slightly convex chips of majolica ware found by our child there was one whose border of scroll-work fitted exactly, and continued, the pattern of a fragment I had found in 1903 on the same shore, and that the two tallied with a third my mother had found on that Mentone beach in 1882, and with a fourth piece of the same pottery that had been found by *her* mother a hundred years ago—and so on, until this assortment of parts, if all had been preserved, might have been put together to make the complete, the absolutely complete, bowl, broken by some Italian child, God knows where and when, and now mended by *these* rivets of bronze" (308–309).

Just as *The Gift* is a text which evolves within the spiral of time past and time present, and proves to be a text in the very process of being written, so *Speak, Memory* is a spiral ("The spiral is a spiritualized circle" [275]), and contains its own end. Invocations of Mnemosyne intertwine with the innumerable loops of that spiral, and finally we witness a complete restoration of that precious broken pottery, lost Russia, whose restoration is completed in three years during the stay at Cambridge.

The differences between the Russian and English versions of this singular book are noticeable and of great interest. They have been already partly analyzed by Jane Grayson in her *Nabokov Translated.* "Reworking can be seen as an essential feature of Nabokov's art," she writes, adding that it functions not only across languages, but also across genres: the theme of Tamara emerges in poetry, is developed in *Mary*, reworked in *Speak, Memory*, and continues in a side episode of *Pnin.* When studying the metamorphosis between the two, and even three or four versions in the case of "Mademoiselle O" (chapter 5 in *SM*) one has to have in mind the formal poetic devices, such as alliterations, puns, jokes, comments on lexical peculiarities, etc., which, of course, are tightly linked with one language. "I fancied that strange, pale animals roamed in a landscape of lakes" says the English text (24), rich in liquid phonemes, symbolizing the fluid sweetness of the view. In Russian, among other changes, the main alliterations in the same passage are M and N, along with soft L ("mne mereshchilis' tomitel'nye dopotopnye dali" [*Drugie berega* 14]). Many details are changed when they cross the language border: when recollecting his childhood and an enormous Easter egg that he suckled through the sheet on his bed, the narrator says: "But that was not yet the closest I got to feeding upon beauty" (24), with some sort of hint at artistic cannibalism. In Russian it becomes more abstract, and more affirmative: "Neposredstvennee etogo mne redko udavalos' pitat'sia krasotoi" ("I rarely succeeded in nourishing myself with beauty more directly than that" [*Drugie berega* 14]). In other parts it is the other way around: the Russian text is richer in allusions and verbal games, such as in the case of "the smoke of the motherland" in chapter 1, a hidden allusion to a well-known verse of Griboedov's: "mne, shestiletnemu, dovelos' vpervye po-nastoiashchemu ispytat' drevesnym dymom otdaiushchii vostorg vozvrashcheniia na rodinu" ("As a six year old boy I experienced authentically and for the first time the wood smoke tinged enthusiasm of a return to the motherland" [*Drugie berega* 20]). (The Russian émigré poet Don Aminado had published in 1921 a small book of nostalgic and bitter verse under the title: *Dym bez otechestva* [*Smoke Without Fatherland*], an untranslatable pun that may well have left its trace in Nabokov's allusion). Some puns appear exclusively in English, as for example, to take the "'bike by the horns' (*bika za roga*)" (*SM* 40), which is perceptible only to Russian readers of the English text. Other verbal games are reserved for the English text, for example the impertinent reference to "Joaneta Darc" and her hallucinations (33). The English-speaking Nabokov evokes "certain spells I am weaving over the tiny sapphire pools" on the seaside as he follows the governess Miss Norcott, and mutters magic words in English: Childhood, Robin Hood, Little Red Riding Hood, and "the brown hoods of old hunch-backed fairies" (26).

Other discrepancies between the two versions are more difficult to explain: the description of the old tennis court has disappeared in the Russian text, as well as the comparison of nature with an eraser: "by the time I was ten, nature had effaced [the tennis court] with the thoroughness of a felt eraser

wiping out a geometrical problem" (*SM* 40; *Drugie berega* 34). The English version describes in greater detail the park, the "path of the Sphingids" (41). The Russian text has no episode with the dwarf servant Dmitri, who fetches umbrellas after a storm has burst, but comes back to the tennis court, laden as an ass, when the rain is already over (42). Shakhovskaia writes: "In Nabokov's Russia there is no Russian people, no peasant, no middle class."[4] True, there are some servants, and yet they appear and disappear from one edition to the next, as unnecessary accessories. Or should we assume that the English Nabokov has been more eager to describe the eccentric *mores* of the aristocratic "usad'ba" ("estate"), whereas the Russian Nabokov exerts a mild sort of censorship with regard to details that might give a representation of life at Vyra that might be too reminiscent of the classical life of Russian squires? Details of the father's biography are also abridged, and the scene when his mother learns about the father's death is omitted. By contrast, additional anti-Marxist sarcasm is added to the Russian version, as, for example, in a remark about the cost of the two ball costumes ordered by Nina, Baroness von Korff, a great-grandmother, who refused to accept them at the last minute in an access of tyrannical caprice: four hundred and forty francs, that is to say, according to the reporter for a contemporary magazine, six hundred and forty-three days of "food, rent and footwear" for "*père Crépin*" (*SM* 56). The English version says this "sounds odd," whereas the Russian one adds sarcastically: "vidimo rabochemu cheloveku zhilos' togda deshevo" ("apparently life for the working man was very cheap in those days" [*Drugie berega* 47–48]). Social interpretation of art and even of life, to say nothing of Nabokov's old foe the "Soviet dictatorship," are constant targets of his fits of pique and sarcasm. The two versions of the passage about "*père Crépin*" are in fact complementary; here, as in many other cases, the English version and the Russian one form a literary "*Janus bifrons*," a two-faced text, a poetic interface.

Nostalgia was a major theme of émigré literature, in Aminado's verse, in Bunin's prose, in Teffi's acrid stories, in Remizov's dreams, in Tsvetaeva's poetry, to say nothing of the Third Wave émigrés, such as Viktor Nekrasov. Nostalgia is an important component of the European psyche, and of *Speak, Memory*, albeit with a tinge of literariness that makes us wonder if it is more existential or artistic in the latter. Loss of the beloved and loss of the motherland are matched, and compared to the loss of a lorgnette in European nineteenth-century literature. That lorgnette symbolizes the mundane element in Russian aristocratic literature (beginning with horse racing in *Anna Karenina*), and is finally lost by Chekhov's "lady with the little dog," a trivial and ultimate variation of the same aristocratic leitmotif (*SM* 202). Russian classical literature helps Nabokov to feel and to overcome that nostalgia. In the Crimea, he identifies with Pushkin: "Suddenly I felt all the pangs of exile. There had been the case of Pushkin, of course—Pushkin who had wandered in banishment here, among those naturalized cypresses and laurels—but though some prompting might have come from his elegies, I do not think my

exaltation was a pose" (244). Tamara lost, the Russian language lost, and the peculiar sense of exile throughout all of Russian literature combine to create a dominant tone of homesickness: "Ever since that exchange of letters with Tamara, homesickness has been with me a sensuous and particular matter" (*SM* 250). This is underlined in different ways in English and in Russian. The Russian text evokes the bitter and all-pervading nostalgia that accompanies the remembrance of a certain patch of countryside near St. Petersburg (*Drugie berega* 216), and those poignant lines are reminiscent of Tsvetaeva's famous 1934 verse on the "*riabina*," the "sorb" or "rowan tree" ("Toska po rodine" ["Homesickness"]). The theme of *Glory* is mentioned a few times: the dream of a clandestine return to Russia is linked with Cambridge, whose single justification seems to be as a frame for that unbearable nostalgia. But the return, adds the Russian text, will never be fulfilled: dreaming has destroyed the dream itself: "No vriad li ia kogda-libo sdelaiu eto. Slishkom dolgo, slishkom prazdno, slishkom rastochitel'no ia ob etom mechtal. Ia promotal mechtu" ("But I do not think I shall ever do it. I have been dreaming of it too idly and too long [and too prodigally. I have squandered the dream]." *Drugie berega* 216–17; *SM* 250). That dream will be fulfilled, albeit in a mock variation, in Part Five of *Look at the Harlequins!*

Nabokov's strong desire to fix forever the souvenir of a paradisiacal Russia and an edenic childhood may be compared with Bunin's in *The Life of Arseniev*, which was inspired by a similar passion for the transformation of the transient into the eternal. Both writers are agnostic, although interested in other worlds, both have a sort of antique philosophy—akin to stoicism for Bunin, and to skepticism for Nabokov. Let us recall a passage from *Speak, Memory*, the scene where peasants on the Vyra estate, in gratitude for the liberalism of their master toss him in the air: "and then there he would be, on his last and loftiest flight, reclining, as if for good, against the cobalt blue of the summer noon, like one of those paradisiac personages who comfortably soar, with such a wealth of folds in their garments, on the vaulted ceiling of a church while below, one by one, the wax tapers in mortal hands light up to make a swarm of minute flames in the mist of incense, and the priest chants of eternal repose, and funeral lilies conceal the face of whoever lies there, among the swimming lights, in the open coffin" (31–32). The scene may be, as Brian Boyd supposes in his foreword to his biography of Nabokov,[5] a superposition of the living father and the father in his coffin after the assassination in Berlin. It seems to me, however, that it is mainly a sort of mock Christian baroque scene, a transfiguration of the father, and not only the father, but the whole Nabokov tribe and the small Nabokov child. The father is compared to God the Father in a baroque fresco, and this parallels a passage in Bunin's *The Life of Arseniev* when the narrator remembers God Sabbaoth on the ceiling of their small church. Although Nabokov does not believe in Christian immortality, he does believe in a sort of vague impersonal life of the dead, as he says at the end of chapter 2: "Whenever in my dreams I see the dead, they always appear silent,

bothered, strangely depressed, quite unlike their dear, bright selves" (*SM* 50). But he thinks that at some moments "mortality has a chance to peer beyond its own limits," although "nothing much can be seen through the mist" (50). And anyway, the author of *Speak, Memory* despises "the appalling insecurity of an afterlife and its lack of privacy" (39).

Speak, Memory is not only a central work in Nabokov's *oeuvre,* it is also a central text in modern Russian prose. It may be compared to Mandelshtam's autobiographical prose (both have colorful, but distinctly opposed portraits of Vladimir Gippius, a teacher of Russian literature), as well as to Proust's and Joyce's, and mainly to Bely's. Bely's influence is patent, and has been confessed to the author of these lines by Nabokov himself in a visit paid to him at Montreux six months before his death.[6] The figure of the father reminds one of the figure of the father in *Petersburg* and *Kotik Letaev* (the latter is Bely's main autobiographical text); the scheme of parental dualism is the same, even though the father is adored by Nabokov and detested by Kotik, and the mythologization of childhood is parallel. The mixture of emotion and sarcasm, and the veil of humor are comparable. In *Kotik Letaev* Bely is of course more engaged in a philosophical interpretation of the myths of childhood: they form a sort of paleo-history of humanity. Nabokov is not alien to occultist interpretations, although he never frees himself from irony: he compares his efforts to discover the true meaning of life with those of "Victorian women novelists" and English colonels from India, who try to guess the unknown with the help of spiritualistic techniques or telepathy (*SM* 20). Even some lexical peculiarities remind us of Bely, such is Nabokov's use of the rather rare and recherché Russian color adjective "kubovyi," translated as "cobalt blue" ("indigo" would be more exact). Vladimir Vladimirovich told me that all translators of *Petersburg* had misunderstood the adjective as meaning "cubic." "*Kubovyi*" is a word that appears a few times in *Drugie berega*, as a hidden sign of Bely's influence. Nabokov, like Bely, is tempted by a gnostic interpretation of the metamorphosis of the young child into a man, but his skepticism does not permit the dramatism at the end of *Kotik Letaev*, where Kotik's coming of age is linked to the pangs of crucifixion. Nabokov's quest for time lost is melancholy, but not tragic. Like Bely, he is deeply interested in synesthesia, by the alphabet of colors, by all phenomena pertaining to the fusion of the senses and the arts; but his "magic lantern" shows us old, modish, deliciously detailed slides, rather than hints of other realities. Sometimes Nabokov teases us with such artificial relations between the past and the present that it looks like a mere joke, a retreat into sarcasm. The theme of flight is an example: his great-grandmother helped Louis the XVI to flee to Varennes (thus provoking the King's ruin), and a century and a half later his father gives his old Benz to Kerensky so that he might flee from the Winter Palace (*SM* 183). The second half of *Speak, Memory* tells of a flight to Europe, and the end of the book alludes to a flight to America, which was supposed to have been the subject of a sequel. Bely's heroes flee from one dimension into another one; Nabokov's flee from

one reality to its phantom and deceiving double. Probably the most moving image in the book, and perhaps in Vladimir Vladimirovich's entire *oeuvre,* where emotion is usually so well camouflaged, is the image of the nomad actors. Remembering his mother in Prague, who lived very poorly, Nabokov says that she has kept little photographs with crumbling frames: "She did not really need them, for nothing had been lost. As a company of travelling players carry with them everywhere, while they still remember their lines, a windy heath, a misty castle, an enchanted island, so she had with her all that her soul had stored" (*SM* 49–50). This vision of travelling actors taking with them Shakespeare's entire world, needing no scenery, no material belongings, is the best possible image for the poetry of time in Nabokov. His autobiography is part of that immense quest for time that the twentieth century has created, with Proust, Bely, and Joyce, but Nabokov's ironic skepticism excludes real mythologism; Nabokov dislikes the obscure, prefers daylight to nocturnal vision. His final image, the vision of the ship's funnel moving between the houses and the underwear on a clothesline gives us a demythologized image of reality: reality is a game, not a cosmological tragedy, it is a scrambled picture: "Find What the Sailor Has Hidden" (*SM* 310). Reality as a toy reminds us of a poem, "To Aniuta," by Nabokov's favorite poet, Vladislav Khodasevich, of whom he says in *Speak, Memory*: "I developed a great liking for this bitter man, wrought of irony and metallic-like genius" (285). The poem describes a small ship on a box of matches, and the miniature life of its captain and sailors. Nabokov's autobiography is also, in a way, a miniature, and a toy.

In *The Enchanter* Nabokov writes of the dream of living in "an eternal nursery." *Speak, Memory* is in no way a return to infancy (as *Kotik Letaev* tries to be), it is on the contrary a very adult text, a poetic and autobiographical domestic epos from one childhood to the next one (the son's). In this sense we may say that it is the last Russian pedagogical poem of aristocratic educations: like *War and Peace*, it develops from one nursery to the next one (from Natasha's childhood to her own children), but the inter-nursery material in Tolstoy is history, in Nabokov it is art.[7]

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NOTES

1. [Editor's translation: "'a lord's life,' Russian style"].
2. Boyd quotes a few passages from them in his chapter on *Speak, Memory* in his *Nabokov, The American Years.*
3. Schakovskoy, [Shakhovskaia], 1979, pp. 94–95 (in Russian).
4. Ibid., p. 94.
5. Boyd, 1990, p. 7.
6. In the company of Andrei Amal'rik, I was received by Vladimir Nabokov and his wife Véra in the Montreux Palace Hotel, I have kept some manuscript notes of that day.

7. For additional studies of *Speak, Memory,* see the relevant chapters and passages in Elizabeth Bruss; Stuart; Eakin; Boyd, 1991; Alexandrov, 1991. See also Rosengrant's unpublished dissertation on the different versions of Nabokov's autobiography.

STRONG OPINIONS

Late in 1967, not satisfied with how Putnam had handled the promotion of his books, Vladimir Nabokov switched to McGraw-Hill and signed a contract which required him to produce eleven books in the next five years. Having planned to write two or three new novels and then fill the rest of the quota by translating his previous Russian works into English, Nabokov stayed mostly on schedule, completing *Ada* and *Transparent Things*, publishing the screenplay of *Lolita*, and revising and co-translating *King, Queen, Knave*, *Mary* and *Glory* as well as three collections of earlier short stories and poems. By early 1972, however, Nabokov still needed one more book to fulfill the agreement with the publisher and he had less than a year to produce it. It was largely to that circumstance that we owe the appearance of *Strong Opinions*, a compilation of Nabokov's interviews, letters to the editor, reviews and short articles. Because of the "hodge-podge" nature of *Strong Opinions*, it is extremely hard to classify the book in terms of genre or mode. Some prefer to see it as a form of autobiography,[1] while others consider it mostly criticism. Brian Boyd even goes so far as to invent a whole new category for the work by calling it "public prose."[2]

The reception of *Strong Opinions* was mixed. A reviewer in *The Atlantic Monthly* found Nabokov "testy . . . the items . . . outrageous and the mixture . . . always a delight."[3] *The New Yorker* noted "the charm of Mr. Nabokov's personality, which lies precisely in its decided effort not to charm but to be exact and frank,"[4] and Diane Johnson wrote in *Christian Science Monitor* that the book was "a mosaic of fact and fantasy, skillfully arranged to hide the man whose opinions glimmer with color."[5] On the other end of the spectrum was P.A. Doyle of *Best Sellers* who found the book "a considerable disappointment": "A strong element of arrogance and snobbery persists, and these anthology selections are not enlivened by enough wit and grace to make such supercilious egotism at least tolerable. The present reviewer has always considered Nabokov highly overrated and this book immensely reinforces that viewpoint."[6] Most of the reviews were quite brief, with the sole exception of R.P. Brickner's in *The New York Times Book Review* which, on the one hand, accused Nabokov of becoming "stupider and sillier yet" in his "ceaseless petulance over Freudianism," while, on the other, thanked the writer for his "immaculate originality . . . his powerful and general uniqueness." Brickner also found that many of the book's perceived weaknesses could be seen as its

strengths: "The interviews, in their accumulation and in their inevitable repetition of questions, set out an esthetic and a lot more of the private man than the private man would acknowledge. . . . Though he composes his answers, they are not always composed."[7]

Whether they liked or disliked *Strong Opinions*, most reviewers agreed that the book was best suited for Nabokov "fans" (Brickner) or even "cultists" (Doyle). In that they proved to be quite right: for Nabokov's more devoted readers *Strong Opinions* has indeed become an endless source of useful information, colorful quotes, and aphorisms (e.g., "Satire is a lesson, parody is a game," *SO* 75). Given the largely informative nature of the work which could make the book extremely useful as a reference, one of the nastiest tricks Nabokov ever played on his audience was to fail to supply *Strong Opinions* with an index. One literally has to "mine" the book again and again in order to find the necessary nuggets of data—which may have been exactly what Nabokov had in mind. Having tried to make the prose of his interviews as good and polished as his other prose, Nabokov undoubtedly wanted *Strong Opinions* to be read and re-read rather than merely used for quick citations.

Interviews

By far the largest portion of the book consists of Nabokov's interviews, given in the ten-year period from 1962 to 1972. Of the twenty-two interviews collected here, nineteen had been published earlier. The range of the periodicals in which they first appeared is broad—from the popular and commercial *Vogue, Playboy,* and *Life* to the high-brow *The Paris Review* and the academic *Wisconsin Studies* and *Novel.* Nabokov's interviews were always far from spontaneous. They were, in fact, as pre-meditated as his other prose: he simply insisted on seeing all questions beforehand and answering them in writing. "I think like a genius, I write like a distinguished author, and I speak like a child," Nabokov states in the Foreword to *Strong Opinions*, explaining his reluctance to submit himself to spontaneous interviews. "My hemmings and hawings over the phone cause long-distance callers to switch from their native English to pathetic French. At parties, if I attempt to entertain people with a good story, I have to go back to every other sentence for oral erasures and inserts" (xv).

As if to prove his point even further, Nabokov starts his collection with an "Anonymous" interview, allegedly taken by "three or four journalists" whose names he did not remember and featuring the following question: "I notice you 'haw' and 'er' a great deal. Is it a sign of approaching senility?" (4). This interview had not been published prior to its appearance in *Strong Opinions* and everything here—the vagueness of circumstances, the absence of not only names but also affiliations, the somewhat unbelievable rudeness of several questions—strongly suggests a Nabokovian hoax, on a par with his listing of non-existent writers and experts in introductions to his English translations of Russian novels.

There is, in fact, at least one more "Anonymous" interview in the collection which may also have been a hoax. Like the first one, this interview was not published prior to 1973 and is distinguished from the rest by the unceremonious rudeness of the interviewer's questions. Several of those questions are so unmistakably Nabokovian in vocabulary and tone that it is hard to doubt their made-up nature. Thus at one point the reporter supposedly asks: "And what are you up to now, Baron Librikov. Another novel? Memoirs? Cocking a snoot at dunderheads?" (196).[8] If the interviews were indeed hoaxes, their existence in a book by Nabokov is hardly surprising. Two of Nabokov's more famous hoaxes—imaginary dialogues between Fyodor and Koncheyev in *The Gift*—actually featured questions and answers on Russian literature not unlike those collected in *Strong Opinions*. The temptation to plant a hoax in one of his most "documented" works, and thus to blur even further the distinction between "fact" and "fiction," may simply have been too strong for Nabokov to resist.

In his "real" interviews, Nabokov often tried to assume the same total control as he did in the imaginary ones. In addition to having questions and answers in writing, he demanded to "see the proofs of the interview—semifinal and final" and "have the right to correct . . . all factual errors and specific slips" (50). This dictatorial tendency earned him quite a few critics. Thus Alan Levy, who wrote a profile of Nabokov for *The New York Times Magazine* in 1971, complained that Nabokov not only wrote out his own answers but also rewrote his, Levy's, questions in order not to have to deal with issues which he was uncomfortable.[9] Andrew Field lamented that, when interviewed, Nabokov "struck poses, didn't answer questions, and often wasn't above being gratuitously rude to his interviewer . . . show[ing] himself to be what another émigré writer termed the 'aseptic aristocrat' artist, the one who feels a special need to be inaccessible to others."[10]

But while Nabokov's craving for absolute authorial control was indeed the biggest reason for his unusual interviewing tactics, we should not treat his repeated statements about being "a very poor speaker" (141) as just another "pose." The common human gap between a "thinker" and a "speaker" was, in Nabokov's case, even further widened by the fact that Nabokov's English was, after all, non-native, and turning it into a perfect code for his thoughts often required much more time and deliberation than oral speech could afford him. Once, charmed by his interviewer, Nabokov let his guard down and was drawn into a lively spontaneous conversation which was being filmed for Channel 13 in New York.[11] Upon receiving the typescript, however, Nabokov was genuinely pained by the quality of his English and the "spontaneous rot" it produced: "I am greatly distressed and disgusted by my unprepared answers—by the appalling style, slipshod vocabulary, offensive, embarrasing [*sic*] statements and muddled facts. These answers are dull, flat, repetitive, vulgarly phrased and in every way shockingly different from the style of my written prose . . . I always knew I was an abominably bad speaker, I now deeply regret

my rashness. . . ." (*SL* 381–82). Nabokov was, at least in his own opinion, not a very eloquent speaker in Russian either ("I have always been a wretched speaker. . . . Spontaneous eloquence seems to me a miracle" [*SO* 4][12])—but in English there was always an added danger of being patronized by the 'natives,' and Nabokov wanted none of it. He could, of course, have solved the problem easily by not granting any interviews. But he felt that since the publishers did not do a good job keeping him in the public eye, he had no choice but to do it himself.

Most of the interviews in *Strong Opinions* were not reprinted from their original sources verbatim. In his brief introductions Nabokov usually states that he had to make changes because of the multiple "inaccuracies" in the original texts. Many of the changes, however, are more than simple corrections. Exercising even further control over his (and often his interviewers') prose, Nabokov made changes and revisions as he saw fit, sometimes obliging his editors at McGraw-Hill and getting rid of "repetitions and boring parts" (*SL* 514), but mostly satisfying his own need for further improvements. It is often arguable, however, whether Nabokov's revisions really improved the original texts. Thus, as he admitted himself in the Foreword, Nabokov eliminated "every element of spontaneity, all semblance of actual talk" (xvi) which somehow had managed to find their way into the original texts despite all his efforts to the contrary. An example is the interview published in *Listener* where, in the original, his discussion of seeing letters in color had an unmistakable colloquial ring to it: "Yes, yes: that's called colour hearing. . . . I'm told by psychologists that most children have it [until] they are told by their parents that it's all nonsense, that an A isn't black . . . that you should not say that. It's stupid, you know, that kind of thing."[13] The colloquial ring is largely—and somewhat unfortunately—absent from the later version which is much more neutral: "It's called color hearing. . . . I'm told by psychologists that most children have it [until] they are told by stupid parents that it's all nonsense, an A isn't black . . . now don't be absurd" (17).

Nabokov also tried to eliminate what he perceived as imprecision and wordiness, making some of his statements sharper, more laconic, and more literary. What was often lost in the transaction, however, was a human touch which the imprecision and wordiness of spontaneity often create. Thus the same *Listener* interview originally ended with a serious and honest, albeit wordy, reflection on whether there exists in his novels "a strain of perversity amounting to cruelty": "Oh, cruelty *is* perverse. Always perverse. Is a butcher always perverse? A butcher is cruel by definition. I don't know. But I think that in that novel to which you refer [*Laughter in the Dark*], a novel that I wrote when I was a boy of twenty-six, say, I tried to express a world in terms as candid, as near to my vision of the world, as I could. If I was cruel, I suppose it was because I saw the world as cruel in those days. I don't think that there is a specially perverse or cruel streak in my writing. In life I'm a mild old gentleman: I'm very kind. There's nothing cruel or brutal in me whatsoever."[14]

When reproduced in the *Strong Opinions*, this statement, cut, polished, and embellished by a fancy simile, lost both its honest touch and the warm charm of a rambling, thoughtful discussion: "I don't know. Maybe. Some of my characters are, no doubt, pretty beastly, but I really don't care, they are outside my inner self like the mournful monsters of a cathedral façade—demons placed there merely to show that they have been booted out. Actually, I'm a mild old gentleman who loathes cruelty" (19).

The polished, aphoristic tone of the book is set at the very beginning, when in the aforementioned 1962 "Anonymous" interview Nabokov gives us a rapid series of personal credos: "I have never been drunk in my life . . . I have never belonged to any club or group. No creed or school has had any influence on me whatsoever. Nothing bores me more than political novels and the literature of social intent. . . . My loathings are simple: stupidity, oppression, crime, cruelty, soft music. My pleasures are the most intense known to man: writing and butterfly hunting" (3).

Nabokov amplifies and embellishes these statements in all his subsequent interviews. "I don't belong to any club or group," he informed Peter Duval Smith in 1962. "I don't fish, cook, dance, endorse books, sign books, co-sign declarations, eat oysters, get drunk, go to church, go to analysts, or take part in demonstrations" (18). "I don't give a damn for the group, the community, the masses, and so forth," Nabokov tells Alvin Toffler in an interview for *Playboy*. "The social or economic structure of the ideal state is of little concern to me. My desires are modest. . . . No torture and no executions. No music except coming through earphones, or played in theatres" (33, 35). "I abhor the brutality of all brutes," he declared to Alden Whitman in 1969, "white or black, brown or red" (133).

Such stark simplicity when dealing with complex social, ethical and artistic issues can be rather shocking, but Nabokov's purpose was indeed to shock. He liked to mock common wisdom and deflate cultural icons by matching the intensity and unsubtlety of other people's views with the intensity and unsubtlety of his own. Some of Nabokov's reactions are undoubtedly snobbish and elitist, but many are also extremely sincere and heartfelt. Thus holding the 1860s literary school of "social concern" in Russia responsible for bringing about the Bolshevik Revolution as well as the gray era of Soviet socialist realism (*SO* 111–112), Nabokov found it both hard and unnecessary to stay detached or objective when discussing the similar tradition in the West. Being a fierce individualist, and having arrived in the United States in the midst of a national craze with the reductive formulas of mass Freudianism, Nabokov likewise felt few qualms about unleashing his blistering attacks not only at the movement as a whole but also at its originator, ridiculing him as a "figure of fun" (66), a "Viennese quack" (47), and a "middle-class . . . Austrian crank with a shabby umbrella" (116). Those who try to read concealed admiration for the founder of psychoanalysis into Nabokov's emphatic hatred of Freud are sadly missing the point: to Nabokov the dangers

of popular Freudianism were akin to those of popular Marxism, and he was no stronger a lover of Freud than he was of Marx or Lenin.

Nabokov's discussions of art and writing are markedly more intricate. He states that he prefers "the specific detail to the generalization, images to ideas, obscure facts to clear symbols, and the discovered wild fruit to the synthetic jam" (7). Reversing the traditional notions of the essence of poetry and science, Nabokov insists on associating poetry with "precision" and "patience," and science with "excitement" and even "passion" (7, 10). The common juxtaposition of art and nature does not satisfy him either: "all art is deception and so is nature; all is deception in that good cheat, from the insect that mimics a leaf to the popular enticements of procreation" (11). "Life," he thought, was often more artful and unpredictable than art, and only "the reality faked by a mediocre performer is boring" (118). He was also careful, however, to point out that he did not believe in "Life" or "Reality" "without a possessive epithet": "Lenin's life differs from, say, James Joyce's as much as a handful of gravel does from a blue diamond, although both men were exiles in Switzerland and both wrote a vast number of words" (118–19).

Some of the more interesting exchanges in *Strong Opinions* occur when Nabokov is asked about the two languages in which he writes. His humility and disarming honesty when dealing with the issues of his literary bilingualism are quite refreshing. Thus in an interview with Herbert Gold for *The Paris Review*, Nabokov confesses that neither his Russian nor his English quite satisfy him: "Of the two instruments in my possession, one—my native tongue—I can no longer use . . . because the excitement of verbal adventure in the Russian medium has faded away gradually after I turned to English in 1940. My English, this second instrument I have always had, is however a stiffish, artificial thing . . . which cannot conceal poverty of syntax and paucity of domestic diction" (106). Elsewhere he calls this situation his "private tragedy, which cannot, indeed should not, be anybody's concern" (15) and laments his "inability to express myself properly in any language" (34). He also muses upon the havoc which his literary bilingualism plays with his identity as a writer: "Nobody can decide if I am a middle-aged American writer or an old Russian writer—or an ageless international freak" (106). Candid moments like this go a long way toward undermining the popular and simplistic image of Nabokov as an arrogant and self-important artist.

Nabokov seems to be equally sincere when responding to Alvin Toffler's question about whether he believes in God: "To be quite candid—and what I am going to say now is something I never said before, and I hope it provokes a salutary little chill—I know more than I can express in words, and the little I can express would not have been expressed, had I not known more" (45). His possible belief in the "otherworld" also manifests itself in the description of time and consciousness which he offers to the same interviewer: "Time without consciousness—lower animal world; time with consciousness—man; consciousness without time—some still higher state" (30). It is somewhat

ironic, of course, that Nabokov's rare (for interviews) reflections on higher consciousness appeared, of all places, in Hugh Hefner's *Playboy*. Nabokov, who obviously was fond of paradoxes of all kinds, may have done it intentionally—but even if that were the case, the sentiments he expresses in response to Toffler's question appear to be quite genuine.[15]

Among the most controversial topics discussed throughout the interview section of *Strong Opinions* is that of possible influences of other writers on Nabokov. Nabokov is consistently unequivocal in denying that such a possibility ever existed—"'What have you learned from Joyce?'—'Nothing.'[16] . . . 'Gogol?'—'I was careful *not* to learn anything from him'" (102, 103). When talking to a reporter from *Vogue*, Nabokov bristles at her suggestion that he has a "Proustian sense of places": "My sense of places is Nabokovian rather than Proustian" (197). "Alas, I am not one to provide much sport for influence hunters," he declared to James Mossman in 1969 (152). Nabokov's heightened and somewhat excessive sensitivity to the issue of influences has puzzled many of his critics who see in his works traces of Gogol, Joyce, Kafka, Bely, Proust, and even Dostoevsky, whom, unlike the other five, Nabokov did not hold in particularly high esteem (see, for example, 42, 148).

While critics are often quite justified in looking for outside influences on Nabokov, one should also attempt to understand Nabokov's reasons for such heated denials. Some of those reasons were probably quite similar to those which made him dismiss Freud: as a writer he feared being reduced to a sum total of other writers' influences to the same degree to which he feared being dwarfed as an individual by simplistic formulas of mass Freudianism. He also wanted to draw a line between imitation and mimicry, and went to great pains to explain that while in *Despair* he *uses* Dostoevsky, he by no means emulates him. T.S. Eliot, whom Nabokov harshly brands in *Strong Opinions* as "not quite first-rate" (42), once said that "immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different." What Nabokov thought he did with other writers was exactly that: he often tried to make what he took from them "into something better" and always "into something different."[17]

Letters to Editors

Nabokov's original letters to the editor, like his interviews, underwent significant changes. A feisty and argumentative correspondent, Nabokov softened the tone of some of the letters in order to maintain, in his own words, "a milder, easier temper" (xvii). He did so largely by omitting several of his "strong[er] opinions." Thus conspicuously absent in the book is the first paragraph of the letter published in May 1966 in *Encounter*, in which Nabokov unleashed a thundering attack on Robert Lowell's views of his translation of *Eugene Onegin*: "Mr. Lowell's intuitional (but hardly commonsensical) arithmetics

cannot interest me since he does not know Pushkin's language and is not equipped to tackle the special problems of translation discussed in my article. I wish though (as intimated therein) that he would stop mutilating defenceless dead poets—Mandelshtam, Rimbaud, and others."[18]

But even after certain revisions, most of the letters published here still have a displeased (if not downright angry) tone about them. There are notable exceptions, though. Two short cables, both occasioned by Armstrong's moon walk in 1969, display strong positive emotions. Invited to comment on the moon landing by *The New York Times*, Nabokov described the event as "the most romantic sensation an explorer has ever known" (217). When *Esquire* asked him what he would like an astronaut to say upon the landing, the writer cabled back: "I want a lump in his throat to obstruct the wisecrack" (216). Elsewhere in *Strong Opinions* Nabokov lets one appreciate how truly exciting this event was for him: "*Of course,* I rented a television set to watch every moment of their marvelous adventure. . . . It was . . . a moment when a flag means to one more than a flag usually does" (150).

There are eleven letters in this section, written mostly over the same ten-year period from 1962 to 1972, and all published prior to the collection's appearance. Nabokov apparently contemplated including one more letter here but pulled it out at the last moment. He had a good reason for doing so: in this letter, written to *Time* magazine in May 1972 but never published, Nabokov called his biographer Andrew Field "a dear friend of mine . . . a learned and talented man."[19] By the time *Strong Opinions* came out in 1973, Nabokov and Field were anything but "dear friends," and Nabokov had drastically reversed his opinion of both Field's knowledge and his talent. Of particular interest among the letters that did find their way into *Strong Opinions* is Nabokov's 1971 response to Edmund Wilson's description in *Upstate* of his 1957 visit with the Nabokovs in Ithaca.

Nabokov and Wilson had not been on speaking terms with each other for seven years following the protracted clash over Nabokov's translation of *Eugene Onegin*, when, early in 1971, Nabokov learned that Wilson was seriously ill. He felt compelled to write a friendly letter in which he assured Wilson that he remembered "the warmth of your many kindnesses, the various thrills of our friendship, that constant excitement of art and intellectual discovery." He also asked Wilson to believe "that I have long ceased to bear you a grudge for your incomprehensible incomprehension of Pushkin's and Nabokov's *Onegin*." Wilson responded in kind, saying, among other things, that he had "included an account of my visit to you in Ithaca in a book that will be out this spring . . . based on twenty years of Talcottville diary." "I hope," Wilson continued, "it will not again impair our personal relations (it shouldn't)" (*NWL* 332–33).

But it did. Having read Wilson's account in which his former friend confessed to mixed feelings about the Nabokovs—"I always enjoy seeing them . . . but I am always afterwards left with a somewhat uncomfortable

impression"[20]—Nabokov wrote an angry response which was eventually published in one of the November issues of *The New York Times Book Review.* Aware that Wilson's health was rapidly deteriorating and that the letter could be viewed as a cruel attack on a dying man (Wilson died several months after the publication of Nabokov's letter), Nabokov justified his actions by stating that as far as he was concerned, "in the struggle between the dictates of compassion and those of personal honor the latter wins." Nabokov was especially offended by what he perceived as a slander, "typical of [Wilson's] Philistine imagination" (218–219) against Véra Nabokov whom Wilson described as a doting and overly protective wife.

Articles

Nabokov's polemics with Wilson over the translation of *Eugene Onegin* are featured quite prominently in the last section of the book, which contains eleven articles and reviews (as well as a collection of responses to the authors who collaborated on Nabokov's seventieth birthday festschrift).[21] There are two articles in this section that deal with the subject of translating Pushkin's "novel in verse" into English. One, written as a review for *The New York Review of Books* in 1964, criticizes Walter Arndt's rhymed rendition of *Eugene Onegin* as a work of a "pitiless and irresponsible paraphrast" (231);[22] the other, published two years later in *Encounter*, defends Nabokov's own "plain, prosy, and rhymeless translation" and singles out the criticisms of Edmund Wilson "for a special examination" (231, 247).

To some, this is the most entertaining part of the book. Thus V. S. Pritchett, reviewing *Strong Opinions* for *The New York Review of Books,*[23] thought that "the only interesting thing in the collection is the essay in which Nabokov opens up his guns on Edmund Wilson's vulnerable Russian. But, as a critic if not as a linguist, Wilson survives the duel."[24] Nabokov's "guns" were indeed loaded. Irritated by what he thought were Wilson's misinformed yet self-righteous views on everything Russian, Nabokov mocked his old friend's "long and hopeless infatuation with the Russian language and literature" and pointed out that Wilson's "mistakes of pronunciation, grammar, and interpretation" are "monstrous" and that Wilson's critique of Nabokov's translation revealed nothing but "the figments of his own ignorance" (248, 256). Stung, Wilson accused Nabokov of "hissing and shrieking" and, in turn, ridiculed Nabokov's English saying that some of his mistakes "double me up with mirth [and cause] me to roll on the floor exsufflicate with cachinnation."[25]

Wilson is not the only critic with whom Nabokov takes issue in this last section of the book. He is also quite livid over what he calls "Mr. Rowe's preposterous and nasty interpretations" of his novels (307) in *Nabokov's Deceptive World.* Nabokov's critique of William Woodin Rowe's 1971 book is grounded in the same distaste for Freudianism—or, as he calls it here, "the

garbage cans of a Viennese tenement" (305)—which we find elsewhere in *Strong Opinions*.[26] But while this section of *Strong Opinions* often displays Nabokov at his absolute crankiest (there is yet another argument over translation—this time with Lowell's rendition of Mandelshtam, yet another devastating review—of Sartre's *Nausea*, and yet another protracted clash—with Maurice Girodias over the publication of *Lolita*), it also features a rare (for Nabokov) loving tribute to another artist. In translating his 1939 Russian article on Vladislav Khodasevich, Nabokov appears to re-affirm his belief that the poet, who is frequently ignored by many readers and scholars of Russian literature, is, in fact, "the greatest Russian poet of our time" (223).

Nabokov's article "On Inspiration" is equally exceptional, for here, too, he largely puts aside the mundane literary squabbles of the day and lets his readers participate in something much more constructive—the process of creating literature. Nabokov's vivid description of the literary process helps to underscore the remarkable self-awareness he possessed as a writer: "The narrator forefeels what he is going to tell. The forefeeling can be defined as an instant vision turning into rapid speech. If some instrument were to render this rare and delightful phenomenon, the image would come as a shimmer of exact details, and the verbal part as a tumble of merging words. The experienced writer immediately takes it down and, in the process of doing so, transforms what is little more than a running blur into gradually dawning sense, with epithets and sentence construction growing as clear and trim as they would be on the printed page" (309).

The book closes with five short pieces devoted to the "other" passion of Nabokov's life: butterflies. A reader who searched in vain for the "agreeable person" of a "milder, easier temper," promised by Nabokov in the Foreword and found only occasionally throughout most of the book, may finally locate him in those Lepidoptera papers where even the occasional criticisms of existing works on butterflies are uncharacteristically charitable and softspoken. Nabokov, who was so fond of the circular "in-the-beginning-is-my-end" literary structures, must have been quite content with this closure for his *Strong Opinions*.

Galya Diment

Notes

1. Random House, Nabokov's newest publisher, lists *Strong Opinions* together with *Speak, Memory* under "Autobiography and Interviews."
2. Boyd, 1991, p. 603.
3. Phoebe Adams, p. 99.
4. Anonymous. A Review of *Strong Opinions*, p. 80.
5. Diane Johnson, sec. F, p. 5.

6. Doyle, p. 445.
7. Brickner, p. 36.
8. Nabokov himself must have felt that queries like that would strain his readers' credulity, for he hastened to explain that he had on occasion "stylized" his interviewer's questions (194). Nabokov's reason for making up this particular conversation could have been his desire to talk about *Transparent Things*, which appeared to have confused many readers.
9. Levy, pp. 4–5.
10. Field, 1986, p. 306.
11. See Boyd, 1991, p. 502.
12. Boyd (1990, p. 313) notes: "Formed and delivered in a moment, likely to be forgotten soon after, spoken language smacked to Nabokov of the prison of the present." Yet some people thought that Nabokov was too harsh on himself as a speaker. "Nabokov believes, quite wrongly, that he does not speak well 'off the Nabocuff'," wrote Alfred Appel; "Yet there are no differences in manner, style, and tone between his oral and written responses" (Nabokov, interview with Appel, 1971, p. 209).
13. Nabokov, interview with Peter Duvall Smith, p. 857.
14. Ibid., p. 858; Nabokov's emphasis.
15. For more on Nabokov and his notion of the "otherworld," see Alexandrov, 1991.
16. At the same time, *Strong Opinions* also features some of the strongest expressions of Nabokov's respect for Joyce—at one point he calls him a writer "whom I revere" (246), and at another insists that his own English "is patball to Joyce's champion game" (56).
17. Eliot, 1964, p. 182.
18. Nabokov, "Nabokov's Onegin," p. 91. In *Strong Opinions* the date of the publication of the letter is mistakenly given as "April 1966" rather than "May 1966."
19. Boyd, 1991, p. 603.
20. Wilson, 1971, p. 161.
21. The festschrift, edited by Charles Newman and Alfred Appel, Jr., came out as a special issue of *TriQuarterly* (17 [Winter 1970]) and was later reprinted in book form (See Newman and Appel).
22. Arndt's translation got the Bollingen prize in 1963 for the best translation of poetry in English—which probably went a long way to provoking Nabokov into writing an even more devastating review of the work than he otherwise would have.
23. The bottom of that issue's cover read: "Nabokov, Sinatra, Angela Davis, & Tolstoy." One can only imagine what Nabokov must have thought of such a grouping!
24. Pritchett, 1974, p. 3.
25. Wilson, 1966, p. 92.
26. For Rowe's response, see Rowe, 1973.

STYLE

For a prodigiously gifted *homo scribens* such as Vladimir Nabokov, there is nothing more precious or distinctive about his constructed persona than his style. Indeed, the written trace *is*, to a degree potentially disturbing to some readers, that aspect of personhood Nabokov most valued. It was *what remained behind*, always under his control, to be wielded with consummate elegance and grace even as the enemy, time itself, took from him his homeland, his loved ones, and eventually his own life. "Summer *soomerki*—the lovely Russian word for dusk. Time: a dim point in the first decade of this unpopular century. Place: latitude 59° north from your equator, longitude 100° east from my writing hand" (*SM* 81), writes the autobiographer of the time-place coordinates of his childhood. If words are vessels of spirit, then such statements are pure "Nabokov": the poetic quality of the Russian *soomerki* (more evocative in English with the resonant "oo" than with the squat "u" of standard transliteration), coupled with an exact placement in memory that is also a subtle chess move vis-à-vis the reader ("your" vs. "my"), then finished off with the playful, winking flourish of the "east of my writing hand." Nabokov's writing hand knows no occident, no dying into the west.

Style was then, one could say, Nabokov's *linguistic personhood*: because it allowed him to join within one created structure the natural world of precise scientific observation and the abstract world of metaphysics and consciousness, it was his pledge of immortality, his active participation in the patterns of divine mimicry. Several recent commentators have argued that Nabokov's style is infectious not in the sense that it can be imitated but in the sense that its demands on the reader *uplift the latter*, challenge him or her to a fuller, more conscious and generous humanity. This claim is absolutely central to Nabokov's entire project as a writer and needs to be questioned further. Does this man's mastery of words inspire or dispirit us, raise us up to a potential we did not know was there, or cast us down into the "galley slave" role of many little Nabokovs? Nabokov's style clearly shows on those who write about him, beginning with his biographer. When, for example, Brian Boyd writes that "Nabokov the scientist never ceased to wonder at the elaborateness of nature's designs, the regularities at every level from atoms and crystals to clouds and comets. He knew how the forms of life branched out from willowherb to bog orchid, waxwing to grebe, elm to paulownia, cichlid to sea-squirt,"[1] he is not only borrowing a trick—*seeing* the world in its marvelous specificity—from the old master. He is, the reader senses, *energized* by that typical Nabokovian oscillation back and forth between the precisely named and the generalizing abstract. If we can locate the bog orchids, grebes, and cichlids within the elaborateness of nature's designs and celebrate through language the consciousness that put them there, we are, in our ulteriority or outsideness, a bit like God Himself on the seventh day of creation.

Nabokov turned the tables on—*ironized*—Romantic irony. It is a trope that he played with constantly in his mature work but at some level took seriously: because his personhood resides so completely in his written, as opposed to biographical, traces, Nabokov the author resembles a god (or the God). He demands that we look for him *in his creation.* The artistic house of cards does not come tumbling down because its creator is in the hands of a higher creator. No, the game becomes worth playing precisely because its first rule is to turn the infinite regress of Romantic irony on its head. Rather than a humanoid butterfly transfixed by a mocking lepidopterist God, we have the forever twitching antennae of cognitive and creative potential. In a modernist reprise of the act of divine Logos (the word-become-flesh) central to the poetics of his Symbolist youth, the three-dimensional writer enters the two-dimensional printed page as a consciousness that then coalesces and reascends, transfigured, into the shadowy intimation of four-dimensional ("divine") cognition. Nabokov's style is the fullest and most revealing expression of the two chief, competing quiddities of his personality: his seeming invulnerability, which at moments of hyperconsciousness or "cosmic synchronization" in the novels approaches God's position on the outside,[2] and his real—though exquisitely disguised—vulnerability, which was an extension of his love for others that, despite his great gifts, was subject to the wages of time. In the pages that follow we will investigate the different qualities of Nabokov's style as formal indices of his mature psychology and personhood and as means of engaging his reader.

Recent scholarship, especially the books and articles of Vladimir Alexandrov, Brian Boyd, Alexander Dolinin, Ellen Pifer, Pekka Tammi, Sergej Davydov, and Elizabeth Beaujour, has focused attention on Nabokov's style (broadly defined) as a way to reevaluate and enrich possible strategies of reading the novels. Alexandrov, for example, has made perhaps the strongest case yet for a direct link between the formal aspects of Nabokov's style and what he calls the "hermeneutic imperative": the experience [of epiphany in Nabokov's art] is . . . structurally congruent with a characteristic *formal* feature of his narratives, in which details that are in fact connected are hidden within contexts that conceal the true relations among them. This narrative tactic puts the burden on the reader either to accumulate the components of a given series, or to discover the one detail that acts as a "key" for it; when this is achieved, the significance of the entire preceding concealed chain or network is retroactively illuminated. This process of decipherment that Nabokov imposes on his readers has far-reaching implications. Since the conclusion that the reader makes depends on his retaining details in his memory, he appears to have an atemporal insight into some aspect of the text's meaning; he is thus lifted out of the localized, linear, and temporally bound reading process in a manner resembling the way characters' epiphanies remove them from the quotidian flow of events within the world of the text.[3] In fact, as Alexandrov goes on to argue, all the various qualities that critics have traditionally

subsumed under the rubric of "style" in Nabokov's case—onomatopoeia and alliteration, anagrams, patterns of imagery, tampering with viewpoint and other narrative ploys, etc.—are placed in the text in the service of this hermeneutic imperative ("deception through concealment"). Even the so-called "phrasal tmesis"—the very Nabokovian "I'm all enchantment and ears" or "the Arctic no longer vicious circle" (*Ada*)—is, in Lubin's formulation, the author's "greater deception writ small. The mind apprehends the terminal words which it expects to find juxtaposed, and then must accommodate the alien phonemes thrust between."[4] The point is that Nabokov, in a manner reminiscent of the early Russian Formalists' emphasis on "making strange" ("ostranenie"), constantly interrupts the flow of his narratives in order to stimulate his reader *to see better*, with increased alertness and cognitive engagement.[5]

A significant added benefit of the studies of Alexandrov, Boyd, and Davydov is that they have introduced greater balance between the notorious "metaliterary" Nabokov (the arch postmodernist *avant la lettre*) and the lesser-known "metaphysical" Nabokov (clearly more modernist than postmodernist). If the stylist is so controlled and controlling that even memory itself becomes, as Robert Alter has argued, voluntary and "un-Proustian," then the metaphysican has let it be known that somewhere there could be a higher presence, a "to whom it may concern," whose fatidic fingers turn the pages of Nabokov's own life.[6] The reorientation has been aptly formulated by Boyd, first in his book on *Ada* and now more recently in his massive biography: "Independence and pattern function like the complementary twin hemispheres of Nabokov's mind."[7] But what precisely does this mean for Nabokov's style? What in his style represents independence and what pattern? And is there a genuine tension in Nabokov's scriptive traces between independence and patterns, and if so, where does it reside?

For the purposes of discussion, I will cite an excerpt that displays Nabokov's style in its typically stunning way. In *The Gift*, Nabokov's greatest Russian novel, the autobiographical hero Fyodor Godunov-Cherdyntsev gets his passion for scientific observation and naming from his father, the naturalist and explorer. Here he recalls some of the lessons imparted to him by this remarkable man: "The sweetness of the lessons! On a warm evening he would take me to a certain small pond to watch the aspen hawk moth swing over the very water, dipping in it the tip of its body. He showed me how to prepare genital armatures to determine species which were externally indistinguishable. With a special smile he brought to my attention the black Ringlet butterflies in our park which with mysterious and elegant unexpectedness appeared only in even years. . . . He taught me how to take apart an ant-hill and find the caterpillar of a Blue which had concluded a barbaric pact with its inhabitants, and I saw how an ant, greedily tickling a hind segment of that caterpillar's clumsy, sluglike little body, forced it to excrete a drop of intoxicant juice, which it swallowed immediately. In compensation it offered its own

larvae as food; it was as if cows gave us Chartreuse and we gave them our infants to eat. But the strong caterpillar of one exotic species of Blue will not stoop to this exchange, brazenly devouring the infant ants and then turning into an impenetrable chrysalis which finally, at the time of hatching, is surrounded by ants (those failures in the school of experience) awaiting the emergence of the helplessly crumpled butterfly in order to attack it; they attack—and nevertheless she does not perish" (*Gift* 109–10; *Dar* 124–25).

The passage is a tour de force, and yet it is standard fare for the mature Nabokov. *The Gift* is absolutely full of such brilliant patches.[8] Without commenting for the moment on *where* the author who makes these observations might be situated vis-à-vis his reader, let us begin by analyzing the passage on the basis of internal evidence. First of all, the *quality* of observation, its overpowering visual acuity—as if the viewer were wearing special magnifying glasses—is immediately striking.[9] The moths and butterflies are expertly named and their activities minutely described. Their colors, sizes, and shapes are lingered over as in a finely drawn illustration for a scientific journal. Their tactile characteristics are brought to life, as though on the reader's own skin, through references to temperature and habitat. This entire naming process is, to repeat, itself empowering, for the wonder engendered by watching the insects' activities does not appear to disable or "strike dumb" the observer; quite the opposite, by giving everything its proper name, the scientist learns to see how the natural world fits together, how its patterns make "artful" rather than "common" sense.[10] The wonder, we are led to believe, makes the boy not less but more alert. As the narrator says a few pages later, the father was "happy in that incompletely named world [the Tyan-Shan mountain range] in which at every step he named the nameless" (*Gift* 119; *Dar* 136). The point here presumably is that to catch butterflies in this way is to "catch" a momentary glimpse into the meaning of existence. The person who can name these things is, again, like God: *nomen est cognitio.* Unlike the ants, which are *not* distinguished as to their roles in their society, the *singular* butterfly is, in the father's words, "calm and invulnerable."

Even so, the naming is not the cool, disinterested naming of the naturalist, and this is crucial, for it is what gives Nabokov's style its magical, transformative quality. From the exclamation point of the opening sentence to the emotionally colored gestures (the father's "special smile") and qualifiers (the "mysterious and elegant" unexpectedness of the black Ringlets' appearance), to the subtle incursions of anthropomorphizing descriptions (the "barbaric pact" concluded by the Blue, the "greedy tickling" of the ant, etc.), we are dealing with a naming that is drenched in human viewpoint and aesthetic sensibility. The precision of the naturalist gives the creatures their proper names; the sensibility of the artist shows how these names interact in a way that makes life appear planned, cognitively invigorating, *meaningful.* That is why we are infected by the thrill of the narrator who learns that some higher intelligence sends certain butterflies to their park only on even years—a kind

of otherworldly chess move. And that is why the contract between ants and the Blue is also satisfying *on an aesthetic level*: the caterpillar of the Blue is "programmed" to eat the ant larvae (aesthetically, ants count less in God-the-artist's scheme of things, and the best they can do is serve as nourishment for beauty), while the ant gets to drink the "wine" secreted by the "sluglike body" before the latter decomposes and recomposes as butterfly.

But most of all, that is why "one exotic species of Blue" can protect itself against the attacking ants by catching them in the sticky substance while it, calm and invulnerable, is given sufficient time for its wings to strengthen and dry. One has to be careful not to read too much into such passages, but there is the temptation to see the strong caterpillar-become-exotic Blue as a kind of Sirin substitute (*sirin* itself being a rara avis): the hoi polloi are not allowed, thanks to the great artist's protective coloration, to get "at him," to paw him with their dirty limbs, to prey on him with their ant-hill psychology. Nabokov's style, despite its remarkable Tolstoyan and Buninesque lucidity and passion for naming, is the sticky substance that prevents the "vulgar" from attacking the "helplessly crumpled butterfly" before it is ready to fly. All that has to do with the hive or social life—the uncontrollable, open-ended aspects of any biography; dialogue in everyday space that can move in any direction and depends on a real interlocutor; the prosaic that is not poeticized; the inevitable pain and even boredom that go with loving another human being, etc.—is seemingly banished as the verbal Nabokov disappears into the "impenetrable chrysalis" of style.

The real-life Nabokov felt these things, to be sure. He knew and freely acknowledged, for example, that he was not a good impromptu speaker.[11] Self-conscious and not naturally warm and gregarious in large groups, he was made uncomfortable by the role of featured guest at a gathering or party, where conversation "flowed" spontaneously and he could not, with his native wit and eloquence, get outside and shape it. And the death of his father, whom he dearly loved and passionately admired, was one of the few genuine turning points in his life. But such matters were not to be smuggled into his art so that others could explain how caterpillar pupated into butterfly. If they were there at all, they were displaced, inverted, concealed.[12] To quote Pushkin, with whom Nabokov shared a fastidious scorn of the mob: "'He [the artist] is small like us [the mob]; he is loathsome like us!' You are lying, you scoundrels: he's small and he's loathsome, but not the way you are—differently."[13]

Sociability is inevitably a mark of vulgarity ("poshlost'") in Nabokov: negative characters, such as M'sieur Pierre in *Invitation to a Beheading*, tend to be full-bodied, crudely gregarious and ingratiating, while positive characters, such as Cincinnatus in the same novel, tend to be lithe and fine-featured (to the point of being virtually "disembodied"), shy and standoffish, and self-enclosed in their world and in their gift. In a recent study Julian Connolly has commented astutely on the tension between self and other in Nabokov's world: "While [Nabokov's characters] seek to gauge the efficacy of their personal

visions through contact with another, they also evince a persistent anxiety—the fear that their unique individuality will be lost through expropriation or finalization by an impersonal other. Desperate to assert their worth in the face of others, many of Nabokov's characters either try to subordinate others to their own designs or withdraw entirely from meaningful interaction with another. . . . Nabokov eschewed the 'social' or 'general' in favor of the personal."[14] Positive characters often possess a secret knowledge (gnosis), as does Fyodor's father in *The Gift*, a knowledge that makes them virtually impenetrable to all, including their loved ones: "It sometimes seems to me nowadays that—who knows—he might go off on his journeys not so much to seek something as to flee something, and that on returning, he would realize that it was still with him, inside him, unriddable, inexhaustible. I cannot track down a name for his secret, but I only know that that was the source of that special—neither glad nor morose, having indeed no connection with the outward appearance of human emotions—solitude to which neither my mother nor all the entomologists of the world had any admittance" (*Gift* 115; *Dar* 131). "Style," in this case Fyodor's father's, resides in the secret (his place in a pattern that is out of this world?) and is perhaps indistinguishable from it. Style is something that belongs to the private individual; its secret is not tellable (nor should it be) and the charisma it endows cannot be shared.

To put the paradox of his gift another way, style gave Nabokov the time that life took away. Here, to quote Boyd, "we can sense the author beyond, making *his* choices in that special space that writing and rewriting afford just outside time, taking advantage of first thoughts, second thoughts, third thoughts to allot his character the illusion of a mind that . . . remains wonderfully free to dart this way and that."[15] Style, moreover, gave Nabokov the control over history that life as an exile denied. Conveniently, the ants in the above passage lack the butterfly's "imagination"; they are, like so many Soviet "udarniki truda" ("shock troops of labor"), "failures in the school of experience." They cannot, from their vantage (spatial and cognitive), make a splendidly unexpected statement such as "it was as if cows gave us Chartreuse and we gave them our infants to eat." It takes the flight of the Blue to reverse common sense. Almost involuntarily, we are taken in by the logic of Nabokov's style: we want the world to be meaningful, the beautiful to survive and fly off, the scientific to be embalmed with artistic blood, the smallest creature to be part of a larger benign pattern, the predatory to be stupid, the engineers of human souls to fail. We want, in short, to be privy to this secret knowledge.

But Nabokov's hermeneutic imperative also instructs us not to look for the knowledge that transforms its seeker in obvious places, beginning with the social activities of the ants. Knowledge of this sort cannot be taught. Mimicry has a "vertical" dimension, while brute imitation is purely "horizontal": the former is the chosen metaphor for Nabokov's style because it both mocks ("mimics") the reader who tries to explain its secret in terms of obvious external—biographical, "Freudian," etc.—evidence and inspires the reader

who sees the subtle camouflaging of small to large as *more* than it needs to be. It always contains a surplus of creative energy that expands consciousness. Mimicry is nature's version of parody (Nabokov's favorite trope), but parody that uplifts because it celebrates its unique placement vis-à-vis a source that is superior to itself.[16] As the narrator sums up the father's (and Nabokov's) position a little farther on, "He told me about the incredible artistic wit of mimetic disguise, which was not explainable by the struggle for existence (the rough haste of evolution's unskilled forces), was too refined for the mere deceiving of accidental predators, feathered, scaled and otherwise (not very fastidious, but then not too fond of butterflies), and seemed to have been invented by some waggish artist precisely for the intelligent eyes of man (a hypothesis that may lead far an evolutionist who observes apes feeding on butterflies)" (*Gift* 110; *Dar* 126; cf. *SM* 125).

Nabokov knew very well that the beautiful butterfly was fed upon, if not by the ants, then all too often by the apes of history. The author's father, V. D. Nabokov, was an heroic and very much engaged political figure; he was plainly not saved from the clutches of the "worker ants" when he was murdered, in 1922, by right-wing extremists while trying to protect his rival Pavel Miliukov during an assassination attempt at a public meeting. Here the authorial chess move is that the biographical son "rescues" the father by making him into a naturalist more interested in the society of insects than in the society of human beings. Then, in something which is closer to a move-to-the-second-power than to a second move, the father, from his position in the other world, helps the son find the "keys" to love (Zina) and to calling (Russian literature).[17] This particular move is at the center of Nabokov's style and all his art: the dead are resurrected through the secret knowledge that they guide the living to the patterns of transcendence. The writing hand is moved by a symbiotic consciousness both in (the son's) and out of (the father's) this world. This is Nabokov's most fiercely guarded article of faith. "Nabokov's textual patterns and intrusions into his fictional texts emerge as imitations of the otherworld's formative role with regard to man and nature: the metaliterary is camouflage for, and a model of, the metaphysical."[18] Nabokov is absolutely right to resist a crudely Freudian logic that has him writing his greatest work *in compensation for* the loss of his father and his childhood. Such logic, which makes the author just another human being, "small and loathsome like us," cannot *get inside* the miracle of creative pupation. It can only explain, by likeness and analogy, after the fact. Nabokov's style was, therefore, his way not simply to gain time but—and here is the metaphysical check-mate—to defeat it.

Let us close with a brief summary and parting sideways glance. It is hard to imagine a more self-conscious and controlled artist than Vladimir Nabokov. And yet, this control is coupled with a gratitude that acknowledges a consciousness more capacious and non-contingent than anything humans can imagine (the author's favorite metaphor for this being a kind of free-floating eyeball capable of turning 360 degrees). If we read the patterns creatively, goes

the logic of the hermeneutic imperative, we will puzzle our way to greater cognitive "independence." Nevertheless, this poetics of gratitude (ours to Nabokov, his to "to whom it may concern") needs to be questioned as a constructive principle. Nabokov, born exactly 100 years after Pushkin, was fond of invoking the father of Russian literature when it came time to construct his own stylistic and historico-literary genealogy. When the narrator says of Fyodor's preparations for his father's biography that "Pushkin entered his blood. With Pushkin's voice merged the voice of his father" (*Gift* 98; *Dar* 111), we are entitled to challenge the difference (species) within the sameness (genus). Pushkin's *Journey to Arzrum*, with its roving curiosity for all manner of alien human subject and its intense interest in the rituals, behaviors, and interpersonal hierarchies of other societies, is a much different document than the fictive biography it supposedly models. Nabokov's scientific cast of mind, his visual acuity together with his love of puzzles and shifting planes and all that is cognitively challenging, suggests a greater affinity with the "positivist" and detail-laden Tolstoy than with his professed favorite, the superstitious, risk-loving, and more laconic Pushkin. Nabokov's games were chess and the hunt for the rare, or better, unnamed butterfly; Pushkin's games were the more socially embedded and ultimately dangerous duel, gambling, and the affair of the heart. There are structures a-plenty in Pushkin's created world, but they are probably not "keyed" to a benign transcendental aesthete. The risks in Pushkin are more real, both to the author and to his reader, the connections to biography, despite the exquisite masking and play, "hotter" and more vulnerable. Both in style and substance, Pushkin is more the poet than Nabokov; poems of the former such as "The Prophet" ("Prorok") or "Memory" ("Vospominanie," 1828) or the Stone Island cycle would be literally unthinkable to the latter. Pushkin's ties to the eighteenth century and his fabled Apollonian restraint notwithstanding, he clearly had access to a poetic "id" (a genuine "lyric I") and to language as disturbing (or arousing) sound as well as enlightening sight and sense. (Nabokov, on the other hand, was apparently tone deaf and had little appreciation for music.) And his biography, both always on display and concealed, required a diet of the unfamiliar and even the threatening. Pushkin was more open to the random or chaotic in life, less interested in words as "impenetrable chrysalis"—he would not, for example, encode himself in his work as a vulnerable butterfly under attack by worker ants. He would be as interested in the future Pugachevs among the hoi polloi as he was in the sensitive artist.

Nabokov, as I have attempted to suggest in this essay, is a rather different breed. Both above the fray and ever unwilling to "let go," encased in the diaphanous armor of his winged verbal creatures, he is Russian literature's supreme superego, and it is doubtful that any naming under the sun could do his transmogrifications justice.

David M. Bethea

NOTES

1. Boyd, 1990, p. 297.
2. See Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 26–29.
3. Ibid., p. 7.
4. Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 13–14; Lubin, pp. 193–96.
5. See Pifer, 1980, pp. 24–26; Dolinin, 1988, p. 19.
6. See Alter, 1991, pp. 620–29.
7. Boyd, 1990, p. 9.
8. While crucial to any discussion of the writer's style, we will leave aside, in the interest of space, the fascinating question of the *Russian* versus the *English* Nabokov. As Jane Grayson has remarked, "The brilliance of Nabokov's later English style owes not a little to his viewpoint as a foreigner. He sees the English language through different eyes. He sees patterns of sound and potential meanings in words which the [monoglot] native speaker, his perception dulled through familiarity, would simply pass over. He deviates more readily from set modes of expression and conventional registers of style, inventing new and arresting word combinations, employing high-flown, recherché vocabulary alongside the most mundane colloquialisms" (*Nabokov Translated*, p. 216; cited by Beaujour, *Alien Tongues*, p. 105). The issue of Nabokov's bilingualism as it affects his writing style is treated with considerable insight in Beaujour, *Alien Tongues*, pp. 81–117. [Editor's note: see also "Bilingualism" in this volume.]
9. "I think I was born a painter—really!—and up to my 14th year, perhaps, I used to spend most of the day drawing and painting" (*SO* 17); and "As a writer, I am half-painter, half-naturalist" (in Quennell, ed., 1980, p. 13).
10. See Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 17–18, 45–46, 53–57.
11. "Formed and delivered in a moment, likely to be forgotten soon after, spoken language smacked to Nabokov of the prison of the present. The very nature of written language meant something special to him: an opportunity to revisit the impulse of a past instant from which time has forced us to march on, a sort of access to a more elastic time where one can loop back on an idea and develop it to maximum power and grace. In the 1960s he began to refuse interviews unless questions were submitted well in advance and answers could be fully prepared in writing. That may look like mere personal vanity, but he was simply hyperconscious of the difference between his spoken language ('I speak like a child') and what he could achieve given the rubbery time of revision" (Boyd, 1990, p. 312).
12. See Dolinin, 1988, p. 17.
13. In a letter of November 1825 to his friend P. A. Viazemsky; see Pushkin, *Letters*, p. 264.
14. Connolly, 1992, pp. 6–7.
15. Boyd, 1990, p. 313.
16. Cf. Nabokov "always favored rhymed verse for the surprises that could be found within natural sense, and mimicry he once defined as 'Nature's rhymes'" (Boyd, 1990, p. 298); and "the spirit of parody always goes along with genuine poetry" (*Gift* 12; *Dar* 18).
17. See Boyd, 1990, pp. 471–78.
18. Alexandrov, 1991, p. 18.

TEACHING

"I loved teaching, I loved Cornell, I loved composing and delivering my lectures on Russian writers and European great books" (*SO* 21). Nabokov was a college teacher during almost the entirety of his two decades in America, and if one is to judge by the central characters of the novels he wrote during and about those years, teaching was at that time central to his experiences: Krug (*Bend Sinister*, 1947), Humbert (*Lolita*, 1955), Pnin (*Pnin*, 1957), and both John Shade and Charles Kinbote (*Pale Fire*, 1962) are academics. This intensive reflection on teaching was also rewarded in the classroom; probably no course taught in the modern world has been as extensively celebrated as Nabokov's two-semester Masters of European Fiction, offered between 1950 and 1958 at Cornell University. One of the lectures has even been dramatized for public television with Christopher Plummer as Nabokov. But Nabokov's teaching career had wound through a wilderness of lowland thickets before reaching this eminence.

During his impoverished years in Berlin, Nabokov took on many odd tutoring jobs, primarily in language instruction (teaching English to Russian émigrés, and sometimes French) but also including tennis, boxing, and Russian prosody. Glimpses of the language instruction can be found in *The Gift*; the tennis instruction has surely contributed to some of the most vivid passages in *Lolita*. In 1936 Nabokov began to investigate the possibility of obtaining a university position in England or America. After arriving in New York in May 1940 Nabokov did some private Russian tutoring before giving his first academic guest lecture in February 1941 at Wells College; this was followed in March by two weeks of lectures on Russian literature at Wellesley.

His first teaching position was at Stanford in the summer of 1941; in anticipation of this and hoped-for subsequent positions he had spent much of the previous year writing out as many as a hundred lectures (far more than needed for the summer), in the process translating a substantial amount of Russian poetry. At Stanford he taught Russian literature and creative writing to very small classes.

This was followed in the fall of 1941 by a specially designed one-year position at Wellesley as Resident Lecturer in Comparative Literature, an attractive and fairly well paid arrangement allowing considerable free time. After a fall 1942 lecture tour of various colleges, considerably expanding Nabokov's experience of American higher education, he returned to Wellesley in the spring of 1943 to teach "an unofficial, noncredit course in elementary Russian" to "one hundred young women," each paying ten dollars for the course which met twice a week and was divided into four sections. These large language classes were taught primarily from a language text rather than from prepared lectures, with assigned homework. Presumably the atmosphere was

as relaxed and informal as it was in his next several years of language teaching, when Nabokov sat with his students around a large table or, as in a 1944 photo, lounged with them on the lawn. He concentrated first on pronunciation and "believed in introducing grammar before all but the barest vocabulary,"[1] but he included amusing asides and items such as the mnemonic phrase "yellow-blue vase" for "ia liubliu vas" ("I love you"). Nabokov's 1958 letter to a Cornell administrator complaining that the head of its Russian Language Department, while probably quite knowledgeable in linguistics, "does not have any Russian," is also significant in the teachers it does praise, "three Russian ladies with excellent knowledge of the language and teaching" (*SL* 263); this approval of native experience as the primary teaching credential reflects Nabokov's own language teaching as well: direct and personal rather than abstract. Pnin's teaching experiences at mythical Waindell College no doubt draw from Nabokov's experiences teaching the Russian language at Wellesley, although Pnin's problems with his department satirize Nabokov's later complaints about language teaching at Cornell and elsewhere.

For the 1943–44 school year Nabokov taught one section of this noncredit course each semester; the next year elementary Russian became a course for credit, with Nabokov its poorly paid lecturer. Intermediate Russian was added in 1945, making Nabokov's teaching schedule three afternoons per week. He requested and received permission to add a course in Russian literature in 1946, promising Wellesley's president "to keep out politics . . . Governments come and go but the imprint of genius remains and it is this imperishable pattern that I should like my students (if any) to discern and admire. . . ."[2] The new class, Russian Literature in Translation, was his first large lecture class (fifty-six students for the first term), and for it he prepared, with considerable help from Véra, revisions of the lectures he had written six years earlier. The formal lecture method used for this class for two years would continue at Cornell, to which Nabokov moved in July of 1948 with the encouragement of Morris Bishop.

Nabokov taught at Cornell until January 1959 with the exception of one semester (spring 1952) lecturing at Harvard and a Guggenheim the following year. Nabokov's load at Cornell was three courses a semester (aside from two his first semester and two during his last two years). For his first two years, he taught only Russian literature to small classes: two two-semester surveys, one in English translation (Russian Literature 151–52) and the other with Russian texts (Russian Literature 301–02), and one seminar (Russian poetry in the spring of 1949, with three students, taught at Nabokov's house; a two-semester seminar on Pushkin for the 1949–50 school year). The famous two-semester Masters of European Fiction was substituted for one course beginning with the 1950–51 school year. This course did not originate with Nabokov, but he made his own choice of texts, including two English novels,

Mansfield Park and *Bleak House*, suggested by Edmund Wilson (*NWL* 17–18, 238, 241, 243, 246, 253). Nabokov prepared another long series of lectures.

In interviews Nabokov insisted not only that his lectures were fully written out but that the text was clear and immutable, and that his students were well aware that he was reading from prepared notes. "Every lecture I delivered had been carefully, lovingly handwritten and typed out, and I leisurely read it in class, sometimes stopping to rewrite a sentence and sometimes repeating a paragraph," he stated in 1966; four years earlier he had said that "although, at the lectern, I evolved a subtle up and down movement of my eyes, there was never any doubt in the minds of alert students that I was reading, not speaking" (*SO* 104, 5). However, even in his first year of such lectures at Wellesley (Russian literature, 1946–47), students did not realize he was reading from a fully prepared text: "his presentation—facial expression, gestures, asides, chortles, and vocal acrobatics—and his delightful material combined to convince me that he was speaking ad lib from a beautifully organized memory and a few lecture notes."[3] A later Cornell student confirmed the illusion of spontaneity: "he was such a superb actor . . . that no one knew he wrote out his lectures, word for word, down to the wryest 'asides.'"[4]

For many years Nabokov's readers had the impression that these lecture notes were impeccably organized and that the lectures remained cleanly typed and unchanged from semester to semester ("vainly I tried to replace my appearances at the lectern by taped records to be played over the college radio"; "I have long come to the conclusion that the best teaching is done by records which a student can run as many times as he wants, or has to, in his soundproof cell" (*SO* 104, 124); Van Veen indeed recorded his lectures in *Ada*). Only when the lectures were published (see *Lectures on Literature*, *Lectures on Russian Literature*, and *Lectures on Don Quixote*) did it become evident that the lecture notes were themselves continually rewritten and somewhat chaotic; "indeed, for some of his lectures on Chekhov, and especially for the lecture on Tolstoy's 'Ivan Ilyich,' reading from manuscript would have been quite impossible since no finished script exists" (*LRL* ix)." Thus in spite of Nabokov's pronouncements, the lectures must have been delivered to some extent ad lib. When one reflects on Nabokov's prodigious memory, there is no necessary contradiction between his claims of reading lectures and the differing testimony of both students and some parts of the written record. In any case, students remembered occasional impromptu asides far removed from the lecture at hand—and Nabokov did answer questions. There were also famous set pieces, such as his dramatic performance in enacting the death of Pushkin in a duel and Gogol's dying agonies, vividly remembered by students from Wellesley on through the years at Cornell.

Véra attended all his lectures, sitting in the front row of the large classes but apparently in the back of the room for the small Russian literature classes.

Her beauty profoundly impressed the students, several of whom described her as "regal" in reminiscences. She would write on the blackboard at Nabokov's request in literature classes, especially Russian literature classes, at Wellesley, Cornell, and Harvard; however, both Nabokov and his students remember him as doing his own chalked illustrations, "drawing on the blackboard a map of James Joyce's Dublin or the arrangement of the semi-sleeping car of the St. Petersburg-Moscow express in the early 1870s" (*SO* 22). Véra also read the examinations and papers, and occasionally substituted as lecturer when he was ill (especially at Wellesley, where she taught his classes for the entire final month of his appointment).

Nabokov's exams were legendary in their attention to specific details, echoing his lecture concerns. He liked to exaggerate the difficulty of his courses and the low grades assigned "to the sympathetic abyss of a college audience": "I automatically gave low marks when a student used the dreadful phrase 'sincere and simple'"; "I once gave a student a C-minus, or perhaps a D-plus, just for applying to [the chapters of *Ulysses*] the titles borrowed from Homer while not even noticing the comings and goings of the man in the brown mackintosh" (*SO* 41, 32–33, 55). These statements probably indicate exceptions to generally tolerant standards rather than typical situations, for he tended to exaggerate the severity of his grading. However, he did assign an F to a student who wanted to give his own lecture on Dostoevsky in class and then boycotted most of the later lectures.[5]

Nabokov always focused on specific details of literary works and rejected consideration of "general ideas." Where translations were the basis of classroom texts, he always began with meticulous corrections of the translation. In his focus on the texts themselves he read substantial passages to his classes with dramatic flair. His preparation included not just close scrutiny of the work but also considerable historical and critical research, to make the milieu more vivid rather than to pursue ideas extrinsic to the work itself. His focus on each writer's genius and originality also emphasized that writer's technical innovations, including, where relevant, what new colors were being introduced to literature. Perhaps his own most succinct description of these teaching methods can be found in a letter to Edmund Wilson: "In connection with *Mansfield Park* I had [my students] read the works mentioned by the characters in the novel. . . . In discussing *Bleak House*, I completely ignored all sociological and historical implications, and unraveled a number of fascinating thematic lines (the "fog theme," the "bird theme," etc.) and the three main props of the structure—the crime-mystery theme (the weakest), the child-misery theme and the lawsuit-chancery one (the best). I think I had more fun than my class" (*NWL* 253). While the content of most of these lectures can now be found in the posthumously published three volumes of *Lectures*, his electrifying classroom performance must be reconstructed from student reminiscences.[6] The

central drama of Nabokov's teaching lay in his ability to collaborate with the fellow artists who were the subjects of his lectures and to include his students in that engagement. The highest compliment to Nabokov's teaching came from several of their reminiscences: "he taught me how to read."

Charles Nicol

NOTES

1. Brian Boyd, 1991, p. 80; the previous quotation is from p. 60 while the photograph is found in this study's unnumbered central pages.
2. Cited in ibid., pp. 90–91.
3. Cited in ibid., p. 109.
4. Wetzsteon, p. 242.
5. Boyd, 1991, p. 308.
6. See, for example, Hannah Green, Trahan, and Wetzsteon.

THREE RUSSIAN POETS

In an ironic and perfectly Nabokovian twist of destiny, Vladimir Nabokov and Edmund Wilson began and ended their relationship through the agency of the same "spirit"—that of Aleksandr Pushkin. It was during Wilson's collaboration with Nabokov's cousin, composer Nicolas Nabokov, on the libretto for an opera based on Pushkin's *Negro of Peter the Great* that Wilson first heard of Vladimir Nabokov. They met in person in October of 1940, several months after the Nabokovs' arrival in the United States, and Wilson immediately suggested to Nabokov that he should translate Pushkin's *Mozart and Salieri*. "Your suggestion regarding 'Mozart and Salieri' has worked havoc with me," Nabokov wrote to his new American friend in December 1940. "I thought I would toy with the idea—and then suddenly found myself in the very deep waters of English blank verse."[1] Nabokov's subsequent translation of Pushkin's work was first published in 1941 in *The New Republic* issue of April 21 (on the eve of Nabokov's first birthday in America). Wilson, the guest editor of the issue, wrote a short preface to Nabokov's translation, stating, among other things, that Pushkin's "wonderful little study . . . has never before been properly translated."[2]

One of the "improper" translations Wilson was undoubtedly referring to had appeared five years earlier in *The Works of Alexander Pushkin*, which was edited by Avrahm Yarmolinsky and featured translations of most of Pushkin's major works. Nabokov was equally unimpressed with that edition: "I have seen Yarmolinsky's and his wife's [i.e., Babette Deutsch's] translations of Pushkin:

their work is conscientious, reasonably exact and careful but they lack my main desiderata: style and rich vocabulary" (*SL* 42). Consequently, when invited to teach a literature course at Stanford in the summer of 1941, Nabokov decided against using Yarmolinsky's *Works of Pushkin* or any other existing anthology of Russian poetry and, instead, spent several months in the spring doing his own translations of not only Pushkin but also Lermontov and Tiutchev. Wilson, a happy recipient of Nabokov's new translations, was exuberant over their quality. "Dear Vladimir," he wrote in April 1941, "this translation of 'Anchar' ['The Upas Tree'] is the best Pushkin translation and one of the best translations of poetry of any kind I ever saw" (*NWL* 42).

When in May 1941 Nabokov asked Wilson to "god-father" his translations for possible publication (*NWL* 45), Wilson immediately contacted James Laughlin, the publisher of New Directions Books, and by the early fall the deal was already in the works. "I . . . think it so kind of Wilson to have praised my painful efforts," Nabokov wrote to Laughlin in September 1941. "I have, as a matter of fact, numerous translations of Pushkin, Lermontov, Tyutchev and Fet" (*SL* 38). He signed a contract with Laughlin in May 1942 (the same contract also included a critical work on Gogol) and completed the manuscript of *Three Russian Poets* in the fall of 1943. The book came out late in 1944 in "The Poets of the Year" series put out annually by New Directions and received little critical attention. A separate—and expanded—British edition of the book appeared in 1947 and was reviewed in *The New Statesman and Nation* by Philip Toynbee who juxtaposed Nabokov's translations to those of Deutsch: "Mr. Nabokov is a deft and loyal translator. . . . Comparing his versions of Pushkin with earlier ones, and, particularly with those of Miss Babette Deutsch, it seems that he has produced something neater and more colloquial and, in these two qualities, closer to the original." But Toynbee may have inadvertently insulted Nabokov as much as he pleased him. He erroneously stated that Nabokov "has not the dubious advantage of being himself a poet" and found in Nabokov's translations some "reminiscences of . . . Auden," whose poetic style was obviously very different from Pushkin's and whom Nabokov did not particularly like.[3] In the same review Toynbee also praised Oliver Elton's translation of *Eugene Onegin,* which Nabokov considered very poor.[4]

Three Russian Poets: Selections from Pushkin, Lermontov and Tyutchev is only thirty-eight pages long, of which almost thirty are given exclusively to Pushkin. In addition to *Mozart and Salieri*, previously published in *The New Republic*, Nabokov also included his translations of two short poems—"Exegi Monumentum" ("Ia pamiatnik sebe vozdvig nerukotvornyi") and "The Upas Tree" ("Anchar")—and two more "little tragedies": a full version of *A Feast During the Plague* (*Pir vo vremia chumy*) and the second scene from *The Covetous Knight* (*Skupoi Rytsar'*). All of these works (except *A Feast During the Plague*) had been featured earlier in Avrahm Yarmolinsky's 1936 edition of Pushkin's works, where the two shorter poems were translated by Deutsch and

the longer dramatic pieces by A.F.B. Clark. Nabokov's reason for re-translating these works obviously stemmed from his conviction that none of those earlier translations had done true justice to Pushkin's originals and that he could get closer to the spirit of Pushkin's poetry than any translator before him.

Whether he succeeded or not remains an open question. Contrary to his later convictions, at this early point of his translating career Nabokov fervently believed that only by preserving the exact rhyme of Pushkin's verse, by "follow[ing] Pushkin's rhythm as closely as possible" and by "mimicking some of the sounds," could one ever hope to provide an adequate translation (*NWL* 45). All these elements are present in most of Nabokov's early translations of Pushkin. To cite just one example, here is part of his translation of Pushkin's "Anchar" ("The Upas Tree") cited together with the original and Deutsch's translation of the same first three stanzas of the poem:

> V pustyne chakhloi i skupoi / Na pochve znoem raskalennoi / Anchar, kak groznyi chasovoi / Stoit odin vo vsei vselennoi. //Priroda zhazhdushchikh stepei / Ego v den' gneva porodila, / I zelen' mertvuiu vetvei / I korni iadom napoila. // Iad kaplet skvoz' ego koru, / K poludniu rastopias' ot znoiu, / I zastyvaet vvecheru / Gustoi prozrachnoiu smoloiu.
>
> Deutsch: Within the desert, like a scar, / On wastes the heat has desolated / Like a dread sentry an antiar, / From all the world stands isolated. // Nature, who made the thirsting plains, / Upon a day of anger bore it, / And root and branch and inmost veins / With foulest poison did she store it. // Down through the bark the poison drips, / To melt as noontide sunlight quickens, / But when the sun at evening dips, / Into transparent pitch it thickens.[5]
>
> Nabokov: Deep in the desert's misery, / far in the fury of the sand, / there stands the awesome Upas Tree / lone watchman of a lifeless land. // The wilderness, a world of thirst, / in wrath engendered it and filled / its every root, every accursed / grey leafstalk with a sap that killed. // Dissolving in the midday sun / the poison oozes through its bark, / and freezing when the day is done / gleams thick and gem-like in the dark. (*Three Russian Poets* 5–6).

One can easily see that in his translation Nabokov kept the iambic tetrameter of the original, its ABAB rhyming scheme, and even the "s-z" alliteration of Pushkin's third stanza. Deutsch's translation is, in these respects, somewhat less accurate: while in this translation (unlike some others) she does keep Pushkin's rhyme, her iambic tetrameter is less regular than Pushkin's or Nabokov's, and there is no perceivable attempt to mimic Pushkin's sound patterns. Yet, while Toynbee is definitely right when he credits Nabokov's translations with a "neater" and "more colloquial" sound, it is by no means certain that Nabokov is a more "loyal" translator of the two. Deutsch's translation appears, in fact, to be closer to the original in other

crucial ways. Thus, unlike Nabokov, she avoids enjambments where Pushkin does not have any and, for the most part, takes less poetic license with Pushkin's images than does Nabokov. If Nabokov set out to give the English-speaking world "definitive" translations of Pushkin he most likely failed—and he was among the first to admit as much later, when he decided for himself that rhymed translations were generally hopeless. It is safe to say, though, that in the inevitably imperfect world of the Anglicized Pushkin, Nabokov's early attempts stand out as among the most fluent and pleasing renditions of the poet.[6]

And so do, for the most part, his translations of Lermontov, who is represented in the 1944 volume with three short poems—"Farewell" ("Prosti! my ne vstretimsia bole"), "My Native Land" ("Otchizna"), and "The Triple Dream" ("Son": "V poldnevnyi zhar, v doline Dagestana"). In his translations of Tiutchev, however, Nabokov often goes beyond mere translational "neatness" and fluency and, while staying close to the originals, manages to recapture the character, tonality, and beauty of several of Tiutchev's poems. Thus Nabokov's translation of Tiutchev's "Silentium" is probably the best translation in the whole book and, very likely, the best existing verse translation of the poem.[7] Nabokov's rendering of the second stanza of the poem (which contains Tiutchev's most famous line—"Mysl' izrechennaia est' lozh'") appears to be particularly successful:

> Tiutchev: Kak serdtsu vyskazat' sebia? / Drugomu kak poniat' tebia? / Poimet li on, chem ty zhivesh'? / Mysl' izrechennaia est' lozh'. / Vzryvaia, vozmutish' kliuchi: / Pitaisia imi—i molchi.
>
> Nabokov: How can a heart expression find? / How should another know your mind? / Will he discern what quickens you? / A thought once uttered is untrue. / Dimmed is the fountainhead when stirred: / drink at the source and speak no word. (*Three Russian Poets* 33–34).[8]

The British (Lindsay Drummond Limited) edition of Nabokov's translations came out under a slightly different name (*Pushkin, Lermontov, Tyutchev, Poems*) in 1947 and featured four additional translations from Pushkin and seven more from Lermontov.[9] Nabokov was far from happy with this fatter volume: to his literary agent he complained that his name appeared but "modestly . . . following that of the lady [Donia Nachshen] who supplied a number of entirely awful and out-of-place illustrations," that there was "no mention of me in the blurb," and that the book had "a couple of hideous misprints, due to the fact that I never saw the proofs." The whole experience left him exasperated: "Never in my life have I been subjected to the cavalier treatment these publishers seem to reserve for their authors. Frankly, I would very much prefer not being published at all in England to being published like this!" (*SL* 84).

The publication of *Pushkin, Lermontov, Tyutchev, Poems* marks the end of Nabokov's honeymoon not only with his publishers[10] but also with Edmund Wilson, whose remark about the English volume sounds much more in tune with the two men's later debates than with the unqualified enthusiasm and exuberance of their earlier letters: "Those translations of yours seemed awfully good in that little English edition—though your last line of "Beleet parus odinokii" [i.e. Lermontov's "The Sail"] is a conspicuous example of your failure to master the English subjunctive" (*NWL* 198). But by then Nabokov was already keeping good track of "conspicuous examples" of Wilson's own shortcomings—like his "failure to master" Russian prosody, discussions of which would create a constant and insurmountable bone of contention in their later relationship.[11]

Galya Diment

NOTES

1. Quoted by Boyd, 1991, p. 19.
2. Wilson, 1941, p. 559.
3. Toynbee, p. 119.
4. Two years before Toynbee's review, Nabokov confessed to Wilson that at one of Wilson's parties "when speaking to Auden I confused him with *Aiken* and said flattering things about the latter's verse in the second person" (*NWL* 163; his emphasis). Nabokov never cared much for Auden as a translator either: "I . . . know a few of his translations and deplore the blunders he so lightheartedly permits himself" (*SO* 151). In Nabokov's estimate, Elton was, however, even worse—so bad, in fact, as to be "inimitable" (*NWL* 313).
5. Yarmolinsky, 1936, p. 66.
6. Some critics believe Nabokov's early translations of Russian poetry are more than merely fluent and competent. See, for example, Boyd's biography (1991, p. 319), where he characterizes Nabokov's early verse translations as "splendid."
7. For other contemporaneous translations of the same poem, see Bowra, p. 29, Yarmolinsky, 1949, p. 81, and Kayden, p. 24.
8. Soon after the war ended, Nabokov sent his translations of Tiutchev to his sister, Elena Sikorskaia, who was still in Prague at the time. Either because his sister was an avid fan of Tiutchev or because he believed his Tiutchev translations were, indeed, the best, Nabokov, somewhat surprisingly given that three-fourths of the book is taken over by Pushkin, described *Three Russian Poets* to her as "a little book of translations from Tiutchev and so on" (Nabokov, *Perepiska s sestroi*, p. 18; my translation). Sikorskaia responded with enthusiasm, telling her brother that "the translation of 'Posledniaia liubov'" ("Last Love") is "splendid" ("perevod . . . chudnyi"), "but 'Silentium' is better" (ibid., p. 32; my translation). On Tiutchev's "Silentium" and Nabokov's sense of the "otherworld," see Alexandrov, 1991, p. 5.
9. The additional translations from Pushkin in the expanded 1947 edition were "Winter Morning," "The Name" ("Chto v imeni tebe moem?"), "Epigram on Vorontzov" ("Polu-milord, polu-kupets"), and "I value little those much-vaunted rights." New

translations from Lermontov included "Imitation of Heine," "The Sky and the Stars," "The Wish," "The Sail," "Thanksgiving," "The Angel," and "The Rock."

10. The same year that his book appeared in England, Nabokov also voiced his disappointment with his American publisher, at one point complaining to Allen Tate that he was "very much bored with Laughlin of the New Directions" and asking Tate whether he thought "Holt might be interested in buying from [Laughlin] all my contracts in toto" (*SL* 73).
11. Nabokov's and Wilson's earlier plans to co-author a book on Russian literature, for which they already had a contract from Doubleday, with Wilson's introductory essays and Nabokov's translations, became one of the first casualties of their growing disenchantment with each other (for more, see Boyd, 1991, p. 66, and *NWL* 170, 172).

TRANSLATION AND SELF-TRANSLATION

Critics have rightly maintained that Nabokov's translations are of such prodigious extent and diversity that they must be regarded as a principal part of his life's work.[1] His early translations tended to be bravura performances, chosen and executed for their difficulty (e.g.: Mayne Reid's *The Headless Horseman* translated into French alexandrines at age eleven[2] or Nabokov's "Russianed" version of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* [*Ania v strane chudes,* q.v.] three years before the publication of his first novel). On a bet with his father in 1920, Nabokov set himself the task of translating into Russian Romain Rolland's *Colas Breugnon,* which he described as "a Vesuvius of words, an eruption of the old-French lexicon . . . an uninterrupted game of rhythmic figures, assonances and internal rhymes, chains of alliterations, rows of synonyms."[3] During the 1920s, Nabokov translated Rupert Brooke, Seamus O'Sullivan, Verlaine, Supervielle, Tennyson, Yeats, Byron, Keats, Baudelaire, Shakespeare, Rimbaud, and Musset into Russian. In the 1930s, he also did some translation into French. When he began to teach Russian literature in English in the United States, he translated Gogol's "The Overcoat," Pushkin's *A Feast in the Time of the Plague,* and the anonymous *Song of Igor's Campaign.* These translations, all essentially pedagogical and literal, contributed to his subsequent decision not to do any more rhymed translations, since "their dictatorship" was "absurd, and impossible to reconcile with exactitude."[4] By early 1949, Nabokov was beginning to contemplate what he then thought of as "a little book on *Onegin*: complete translation in prose with notes giving associations and other explanations for every line."[5] During this period Nabokov also translated a good deal of Russian poetry into English and closely supervised his son Dmitri's translation of Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time.*

When one adds Nabokov's self-translations of many of his own early works (including poems) from Russian into English, the multi-stage linguistic metamorphosis of *Conclusive Evidence/Speak, Memory/Drugie berega/Speak,*

Memory: An Autobiography Revisited, his self-Russianed *Lolita*, his careful and extensive revision of draft English translations of his Russian works prepared by others (and, in the last years, his equally careful revision of French translations based on the now-canonical English versions of his novels), and, finally, when one adds the articles and lectures which propagated his theories of translation, it is evident that translation absorbed much of Nabokov's creative energy.

Furthermore, many of Nabokov's novels are overtly concerned with problems of translation (e.g., Ember's grappling with Shakespeare in *Bend Sinister,* Conmal's (mis)translation of *Timon of Athens* in *Pale Fire*, or Pnin's classroom exercise in translating Pushkin and his enduring affection for the death of Ophelia in a Russian translation: "'*plïla i pela, pela i plïla . . .*'. . . she floated and she sang, she sang and floated . . . ," one of those "beautiful, noble sonorous lines" which he can never find when he is "reduced to look up something in the English version" (*Pnin* 79). Shakespeare has: "Her clothes spred wide / And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up, / Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds" (*Hamlet*, IV, vii). Critics such as Clarence Brown, Priscilla Meyer and John Lyons have seen translation to be a central metaphor in *Pale Fire* (written in close proximity to the work on *Onegin*), and read Kinbote's demented commentary to Shade's poem as an ironic calque of Nabokov's voluminous notes on *Eugene Onegin* and/or of Pope's *Dunciad.*[6] Boyd opines that the Russianing of *Lolita* was linguistically generative for the intrinsically polyglot *Ada*,[7] and D.B. Johnson demonstrates convincingly a variety of modes of "translation" (in both the strict sense and as an instance of a more generalized semiotic transfer) in Nabokov's "ambidextrous universe."[8]

Despite his evident prowess as a translator and his predilection for metamorphoses, Nabokov's relations with translation and self-translation properly speaking were complicated (in the Soviet sense of *slozhnye*) and far from comfortable. Not only did translating take time and energy away from Nabokov's own creative work, he realized that it was an entirely different kind of activity than writing, and he found alternating between the two problematic. In a letter to James Laughlin, Nabokov complained that translation "requires another section of the brain than the text of my book, and switching from the one to another by means of spasmodic jumps causes a kind of mental asthma" (*SL* 42). Nabokov's difficulty can be explained by neurolinguistic data which show that the neurological processes underlying translation are quite separate from those involved in understanding, reading, or writing directly in either of a bilingual's languages.[9] (This may have something to do with differing processes for retrieval of cued and uncued memories. For more on the neurolinguistics of translation and current theories about the "stages" of literary translation, see Beaujour and Leighton.)

Although Nabokov was a prolific and ingenious translator of both poetry and prose, and despite his evident early pleasure in triumphantly transposing almost impossible texts (*Ania v strane chudes* is an early example of Nabokov's

gift for multilingual punning[10]), by the 1940s Nabokov clearly doubted the moral and aesthetic status of translation—especially the legitimacy of translating major works of poetry, and, in particular, the legitimacy of translating great poetry from Russian into English.

The Talmud states that "He who translates a verse literally is a liar." Nabokov held on the contrary that anyone who does *not* translate literally is a liar. According to his mature translation theory, only a literal translation stands any chance at all of being "true" to the original text. He claims in his foreword to *Onegin* (vol. 1, p. viii) that a literal translation can render "as closely as the associative and syntactic capacities of another language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original." He also demands that the translator who has the temerity to try to transpose a major work of literature into another language have "as much talent, or at least the same kind of talent as the author that he chooses" and a thorough knowledge of both nations and languages. The translator must also be "perfectly acquainted with all the details relating to his [author's] manner and methods." Last, but by no means least: "Beyond genius and knowledge," he must "possess the gift of mimicry and be able to act, as it were, the real author's part, by impersonating his tricks, demeanor and speech, his ways and his mind, with the utmost degree of verisimilitude" ("The Art of Translation," *LRL* 319–20).

Although in 1925 Nabokov had claimed that writers themselves were but "translators of God's creation, his little plagiarists and imitators [who] dress up what he wrote, as a charmed commentator sometimes gives an extra grace to a line of genius,"[11] Nabokov's mature definition of the ideal translator, properly speaking, requires that he be *only* a performer and interpreter, someone willing to subordinate his own creative talent in order to mimic another. Obviously, this constraint must be problematical for any translator with "as much talent as the author he chooses." One must also remember that while Nabokov admires and is touched by mimicry and imitation in nature (insects that imitate sticks and fallen leaves; butterflies with huge eyes on their wings to resemble larger, fiercer beasts), he despises mimicry in human beings and in art. Even the mediocrely gifted Ardalion knows that "what the artist perceives is, primarily, the *difference* between things. It is the vulgar who note their resemblance" (*Des* 41).

The horror of replicas, copies, facsimiles, and reproductions is a major theme in many of Nabokov's novels (not least of all in *Despair*, where the identity of two different beings turns out to be a pathological illusion). Since what Nabokov prizes in art is specificity and difference, mimics in his works always get things wrong and miss the essence, while slowly being transformed into cruder versions of their victims. Witness the abominable Cockerell, who devotes his life to imitations of Pnin, or the plight of Vadim Vadimich, hero of *Look at the Harlequins!*, who feels that he is a non-identical twin, an inferior variant, condemned to impersonate another writer who will "always be incomparably greater, healthier and crueler" (*LATH* 89).

Nabokov's own repugnance for imitating and impersonating "another, greater writer . . ." was certainly a major factor in his refusal to make a verse translation of *Eugene Onegin*, since, as the narrator of *Bend Sinister* remarks about Ember's translation of Hamlet: "the greatest masterpiece of imitation presupposes a voluntary limitation of thought, in submission to another man's genius" (*BS* 120). Except for this reluctance, Nabokov should have been the ideal twentieth-century translator of *Onegin.* If, as it would seem, Nabokov's requirements limit each true translator to one true author, then Pushkin was Nabokov's author.[12] He had devoted years to becoming "perfectly acquainted with all the details relating to [Pushkin's] manner and methods," traveling down Pushkin's "secret stem," reaching his root, and feeding upon it ("On Translating 'Eugene Onegin'"). Before embarking on his "Onegin Project," Nabokov had written at least one poem in imitation of Pushkin, which he had presented to his parents in 1920 as "an unpublished poem by Alexandr Sergeevich."[13] He had already gracefully and quite faithfully translated a good deal of Pushkin into English, had rendered some Pushkin stanzas marvelously well into French, and could manipulate the *Onegin* stanza with ease in Russian (in his early *Universitetskaia poema* he had himself produced a canto-length work using the *Onegin* stanza in reverse)[14] and in English ("On Translating 'Eugene Onegin'"). But Nabokov would neither bow his own artistic persona to the "grateful yoke" of mimicry nor show off at Pushkin's expense by creating a bravura paraphrase of *Evgeny Onegin* which would have satisfied monolingual readers of English that they had "read" Pushkin's novel in verse. For in the end, Nabokov did not really believe that Pushkin *should* be translated. The commentary is in fact the heart of the "Onegin Project," and the translation "proper" is of minor importance, almost a pretext.[15]

Nabokov knew that although his literal translation of *Onegin* was in his own terms "true," it was "stiff and rhymeless." He also recognized that his "laborious literal reproduction" of Pushkin's *Onegin* was prevented by the "rigor of fierce fidelity from parading as a good English poem" (*SO* 282), all the more so since the English tradition rejects literalism. (Dryden called it "metaphrase," and with Denham insisted that a literal translation preserved "only the ashes, not the flame" of the original.[16]) Nabokov cheerfully admitted that "shorn of its primary verbal existence, the original text will not be able to soar and to sing, but it can be very nicely dissected and mounted, scientifically studied in all its organic details" ("Problems of Translation: 'Onegin' in English," p. 135). Scientists have known since Harvey that, while dissection is a useful pedagogical tool, it does not enable one to understand the functioning of *living* organisms and processes such as the circulation of the blood. But Nabokov did not wish the monolingual English-language reader to have the illusion that he could experience the *living* Pushkin. As Clayton observes, Nabokov's "literal translation" is therefore the assertion of the impossibility of translation, resting on a belief in the uniqueness of a great original.[17] It is therefore deliberately "adversionary,"[18] turning the target

language towards the source, deforming English grammar with malign satisfaction. (One hears the unquiet ghost of Ezra Pound ranting that inversions of sentence order in an uninflected language like English "are not, simply and utterly *are not* any sort of equivalent for perturbations of order" in an inflected language.[19]) Even Nabokov's entirely justified effort to show the ways in which Pushkin's text echoes borrowings from French "paraphrases" of English originals frustrates the English-language reader. To take one of Nabokov's own examples: Pushkin's parody of a line by Dmitriev, which is itself a paraphrase of a French translation of a line by Pope. (See Nabokov's commentary to *Onegin* VII, ii.) Nabokov *explains* Pushkin's process of transformation in fascinating detail in his commentary, but he insists on translating the translation rather than returning to Pope, thus depriving the English-language reader of the ability to recognize *some* echo, as Pushkin's contemporaries could recognize the reference in its French guise.

The translation alone is almost useless to the monolingual reader of English. At most, it is a *"version,"* which the theoretician of translation André Lefevre argues must no more be called a "translation" than should a "free imitation." What Nabokov has made is, as he himself boasted, a crib, a pony, an aid to less-than-complete bilinguals who need help in working with the original. Nabokov revised this pony several times to make it still more "ideally interlinear and unreadable" (*SL* 482). Because it was not meant to stand alone, it should, as Boyd says, actually have been printed as an interlinear with the original Russian.[20] For as George Steiner has observed, however faithful an "interlinear" may be in principle, in practice it is not a translation but "a contingent lexicon."[21]

In his refusal to "imitate" Pushkin and his reliance on an overwhelmingly detailed, erudite, and sometimes cranky commentary to call attention to what has been lost in the crib, Nabokov has cast himself not in the role of "the professional writer, relaxing in the company of a foreign confrere," but in that of "the scholar who is eager to make the world appreciate the works of an [in this case, not] obscure genius as much as he does himself" (*LRL* 319). Nabokov has been, as he demands of the scholar–translator, exact and pedantic. The footnotes, which he would ideally have wanted to be on the same page as the line on which they comment, are indeed "maximally copious and detailed," so much so, that many of them are several pages long in themselves. In the role of "scholar," Nabokov has displayed himself to great advantage and done a major service for other scholars and for the relatively few English-speaking persons able to read Pushkin in the original (with or without the help of his crib).[22] It is probable, however, that Pushkin himself would not have approved. Like Nabokov's, Pushkin's original works were written for an essentially polyglot public, but Pushkin's efforts at translating poetry were of the kind that Nabokov rejects, and there is no question that Nabokov's *Eugene Onegin* does not do for English what Pushkin's translations did for Russian. Yet by not emulating Pushkin's own practice as a translator, by choosing the

solution of "supplimentarity,"[23] and in effect refusing to translate *Onegin* so as not to sully it with "dove droppings" ("On Translating 'Eugene Onegin'"), Nabokov created a monumental edifice of devotion[24] to a text which he would not try to duplicate and to a poet with whom he would not duel.

Given Nabokov's respect for "originals" and his distaste for "replicas," it is understandable that his relations with self-translation should have been even more complex than his Mexican stand-off with Pushkin. Many writers who are bilinguals or polyglots find self-translation to be exquisitely painful, particularly when, as is initially the case, they are translating out of their first language (L1) and into their second (L2). The experience of self-translation is so unpleasant that it frequently precipitates writers into finally committing themselves to writing directly, and sometimes exclusively, in a second language with which they had previously only dallied, since, contrary to received opinion, they find it easier to express themselves on almost any subject, even the most emotionally charged, in either language than to translate from one language into the other. Choosing to write directly in one's second language, or even in an ambient third language, therefore seems preferable to the prospect of decades of the self-imposed torture of self-translation.

Self-translation also has other drawbacks. Not only is it unpleasant, it is also dangerous, since it undermines the status of the L1 work. When a book is translated by someone else, the fact of translation in no way diminishes the stature of the original. Certainly it can never *replace* it. But when a writer self-translates, it may happen that the L2 text is not merely a facsimile, a replica, or even an equivalent but an improvement, even a replacement for the first text. In "the queer world of verbal transmigration" (*LRL* 315), when the soul of the text has been transferred by its author to a second language, is the original L1 text to be discarded like a worn out body? (Nabokov did use the later English versions of his early Russian novels as the basis for subsequent translations into other languages, especially into French.) If, on the other hand, the L2 version is not accepted as canonical, then self-translation threatens the writer's self-image of his artistic particularity; self-replication is schizophrenic.

While to write directly in a second language after having created a style and achieved fame in the first is a *podvig*, a positive and ambidextrous exploit, where the writer works "without net" directly over the void (*LATH* 120), self-translation does not provide this "excitement of verbal adventure" (*SO* 106). Furthermore, devoting oneself to translating one's previous books will actually hamper further creative development. (Nabokov noted in 1942, "the translation of my Russian books is in itself a nightmare. If I were to do it myself, it would obviously prevent me from writing anything new" [*NWL* 56]). Nevertheless, in accordance with Nabokov's own criteria, the author is obviously his own ideal translator. How is this dilemma to be resolved?

Nabokov adopted a variety of solutions at different periods and for different works. The least painful, and quite successful, stratagem provided a way to reactivate the author's creative process while assuring that the product,

the translation, remained "faithful" to the original text. Nabokov had gifted translators (Glenny, Scammell, and above all, his son Dmitri) do an initial version, which he then heavily corrected. The process of correction is more like reworking a draft than it is like translating. The revision, even though it is of a draft in a second language, may therefore be experienced as partaking of a normal stage in the "rewriting" or polishing of a work. (In principle, this procedure was also to help Nabokov avoid the temptation of revising his earlier works, but it did not, for example, prevent him from considerably reworking *Korol', dama, valet* [*King, Queen, Knave*] on the basis of Dmitri's literal translation.)

Unfaithful self-translation provides another solution to the bilingual author's problem. When the translator is the author himself, he need not be bound by the strictures of "literal" translation that Nabokov imposes on translators of the works of others. Self-translations are therefore almost inevitably less "faithful" to the original on the level of detail than are good translations by other hands. A self-translation which is a reworking is like a second or third draft. As Grayson has observed,[25] Nabokov's absolute creative authority allowed him to revise his text when and how he liked, on either a small or a large scale, because, as Dmitri Nabokov has put it, his father's works were "alive and fair game for updating by the author as long as he, too, lived."[26] It is therefore not surprising that when he self-translated, Nabokov habitually violated his own strictures about fidelity to meaning in order to retain certain underlying principles of stylistic organization, including the frequent sacrifice of sense for sound.[27] Such "unfaithful" self-translation allows the creator/translator to take into account "the interrelation of words and non-correspondence of verbal series in different tongues," whereas a translator condemned to literal word-by-word translation has no hope of tackling "the exchange of secret values" created by the interaction of certain words in a specific order (*LRL* 320–21).

Nabokov's transformations of *Otchaianie* (*Despair*) provide good examples of both the torments of strict self-translation and of the virtues of "unfaithful" self-translation. *Otchaianie* was written in 1932, and Nabokov has claimed that his translation of it in 1936 was "his first serious attempt . . . to use English for what may be loosely termed an artistic purpose" (*Des* xi). (Boyd has uncovered some evidence that this was not in fact the case.[28]) This experience of self-translation was intensely disagreeable. Nabokov complained to Zinaida Schakovskoy that translating oneself was a terrible thing, "sorting through one's own innards and then trying them on like a pair of gloves."[29] Worst of all, Nabokov was displeased with the results. Almost thirty years later, he returned to *Otchaianie,* revising and transforming the 1936 translation, and together with it the novel itself, thus rendering both the Russian novel and the first English translation retroactively incomplete. The older Nabokov claimed that his younger self would have been "pleased and excited" had he been able to foreread the 1965 version. "The ecstatic love of

a young writer for the old writer he will be someday is ambition in its most laudable form." (*Des* xii). But since the "old writer" had revised the novel only in English and not in Russian, *Otchaianie* has been to all intents and purposes definitively replaced by the 1965 *Despair* as was the 1928 Russian *Korol', dama, valet* by the 1966 English *King, Queen, Knave.*

An even more interesting instance of the interaction of self-translation, revision, and "verbal adventure" is the complex history of *Conclusive Evidence/ Speak, Memory/Drugie berega/*and *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited.* Initially Nabokov chose to write directly autobiographical prose in French and then in English. He admitted that writing *Conclusive Evidence* was particularly agonizing because his memories were "attuned to one (musical) key," a Russian one, but had to be expressed through another which, "through force of circumstance," was English (*Drugie berega,* p. 8). One should note, however, that Nabokov claims elsewhere to have been a "normal trilingual child" and that the "circumstance" that "forced" him to write in English was not so much the external one of residence in an English-speaking country as it was his private, internal decision to write prose only in English.

Despite the difficulty of writing *Conclusive Evidence* in English, Nabokov was relatively satisfied with it until he embarked on what he himself characterized as the "insane project" of self-translating *Conclusive Evidence* back into Russian. In many respects, however, *Drugie berega* is not a translation but a rewriting of the *Conclusive Evidence* material. The fact that the target language was Russian this time, rather than English, acted as a catalyst to reactivate the creative process in a language in which Nabokov had forbidden himself to write. Writing in Russian acted like a tea-soaked madeleine, provoking additions and elaborations, and triggering the return of details of memories. Nabokov cut a few explanatory passages from *Conclusive Evidence* which were unnecessary for a Russian-reading audience, but frequently he preferred to leave such passages in and to *explain* in *Drugie berega* why it had been necessary to include explanations for an English-reading audience, explanations which he was now discussing with his Russian readers, thus choosing a version of what theoreticians of translation call the "commentarial" option,[30] making the existence of the first English-language work an essential intertext of the second Russian-language one.

There are, however, some elements of *Conclusive Evidence* that Nabokov decided to omit from *Drugie berega*: some cultural explanations, certainly, but also parts of the Tamara material, and most interesting of all, an entire chapter about his first summer as a (Russian) poet. It may seem paradoxical that precisely this material should have been excluded from the *Russian* incarnation of the text, where it would seem particularly pertinent and essential. Nabokov explains that he left it out "because of the psychological difficulty of replaying a theme elaborated in my *Dar* [*The Gift*]" (*SM* 12).

The plea of the "psychological difficulty of replaying a theme" in translating into Russian would suggest that Nabokov's role in the creation of *Drugie*

berega partook more of the process of active writing than of self-translation, for, after all, self-translation is *always* replaying a theme. An examination of the text as well as Nabokov's own comments would support this argument. In fact, it is perfectly possible to maintain, as does Jane Grayson, that in *Drugie berega*, the Russian language *itself* has a compositional role, and that *Drugie berega* is stylistically and structurally in many ways an independent work from *Conclusive Evidence*,[31] a situation signaled by a radically different title. Nor is *Drugie berega* subsequently simply *replaced* by the English-language *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*, which is more than a faithful translation of *Drugie berega*. Nabokov incorporated into *Speak, Memory* what he himself called "basic changes" to the original *Conclusive Evidence* as well as additional material which had reemerged into memory during the fertile transplantation of the text into Russian as well as a variety of additions and corrections provided by relatives and documents refound. The total process was once again a *podvig* of the type to which Nabokov was addicted. As he put it himself: "This re-Englishing of a Russian re-version of what had been an English re-telling of Russian memories in the first place, proved to be a diabolical task, but some consolation was given me by the thought that such multiple metamorphosis, familiar to butterflies, had not been tried by any human before" (*SM* 12–13).

The complex process of recasting and remolding Nabokov's memoirs was generative at each step and may be considered an exemplary instance of the creative virtues of unfaithful self-translation. Nabokov's return to the active use of Russian in *Drugie berega* had not only broken his self-imposed taboo against writing prose in Russian, it also prepared Nabokov's ultimate acceptance of himself as a fully bilingual writer and paved the way for the intrinsically polyglot novels of his later years such as *Ada*. It also led to the decision to "Russian" his American novels, particularly *Lolita*, a project which was supposed to complete the circle of his creative life, or rather start "a new spiral" (*SO* 52).

Yet Nabokov was deeply discouraged and dissatisfied with the Russianing of *Lolita*. In part he attributed his disappointment to the "rustiness" of his Russian, but one must remember that Nabokov had also always complained about the thinness of his *English* and *its* stiffness. Nabokov's Russian was certainly not "rusty" in 1953 when after 15 years of disuse he wrote *Drugie berega*. Nor does his preface to the Russian *Lolita* show signs of linguistic atrophy. Perhaps what were rusty were Nabokov's purely translatorly pathways, since in *Lolita*, unlike the second *Despair* or *Drugie berega*, he limited himself quite strictly to the instrumental role of translator, allowing himself almost no freedom to revise. "As a translator... I pride myself only on the iron hand with which I checked the demons who incited me to deletions and additions," says Nabokov in his postscript to the Russian edition. (For a somewhat different view, see Proffer, 1984, and George Cummins.) There are the inevitable minor, yet doubtless satisfying, polyglot inventions in the Russian *Lolita* (e.g.: chosen almost at random, *tipchik* and *dripchik* for "goon"

and "drip," and alliterative transformations such as *dosuzhie, sukhie sny* for "idle day dreams" [Russian *Lolita* 54]); and Nakhimovsky and Paperno claim more than 7,000 instances where the Russian equivalents that Nabokov has chosen for words and expressions in the American *Lolita* do not appear in standard English/Russian dictionaries (Nakhimovsky and Paperno, p. v). But in the economy of the transformation more has been lost than gained, because Nabokov has concentrated on the faithfulness of the product to the original and has sacrificed the creative process. The American *Lolita* is unmistakably still the final version, and the translation is at best a facsimile, having provided none of the regenerative pleasures of the second Englishing of *Otchaianie* or the Russianing of *Conclusive Evidence.*

In the pair *Drugie berega/Speak, Memory* Nabokov has approached the solution of the mature Beckett which involves neither replacement nor facsimile but rather complementarity, "alternative outcomes of the same textual productivity,"[32] the complete work being the totality of the two variants which circle in orbit together. One could therefore argue that although translation, and in some cases self-translation, have played a crucial part in Nabokov's development, the true locus of his "writing across languages"[33] is not in translation and in the translated works at all but rather in *Pnin* and particularly in *Ada*, the books which most *resist* translation, because they are intrinsically polyglot. *Ada* certainly seems to manifest the existence of a polyglot textual matrix which escapes the constraints of any one language system, and its characters profit constantly from the advantage of being able to use three languages, which Nabokov himself defined as: "the ability to render an exact nuance by shifting from the language I am now using to a brief burst of French or to a soft rustle of Russian" (*SO* 184).

As Jacques Derrida has observed, one of the limits of theories of translation is that "all too often they treat the passing from one language to another and do not sufficiently consider the possibility for languages to be implicated more than two in a text. How is a text written in several languages at a time to be translated? How is the effect of plurality to be 'rendered?' And what of translating with several languages at a time,"[34] should that even be called *translating*?

How does one go about translating a work like *Ada*? Nabokov gave "the blood of [his] brain" to correcting the French translation of *Ada* by Cahine and Blandenier,[35] a task made even more difficult because Nabokov felt that translating from Russian to English was a little easier than from English to Russian and "ten times easier" than from English to French (*SO* 36). In the spring of 1975, he was considering having *Ada* translated into Russian by someone else under his tight control, as he had done for the translation of many of his Russian novels into English. If he could not find "a docile assistant" he was, however, determined to translate it into "romantic and precise Russian" himself.[36] One may speculate that such a translation would necessarily have been outrageously unfaithful to the original in word and sound play, and that

much would have had to remain in the original language, including a lot of English in transliteration, since the novel was at least "plural" in the original. Probably the result would have been not a translation but a transposition, the creation of a "complementary text." As such, it would have been a triumphant monument to Nabokov's polyglot artistic essence.

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Notes

1. Rosengrant; Grayson; Leighton.
2. Boyd, 1990, p. 81.
3. Ibid., p. 176.
4. Boyd, 1991, p. 136. See also D.B. Johnson, 1974.
5. Boyd, 1991, p. 136.
6. C. Brown, 1967, pp. 203–206; Meyer, 1988; Weil, p. 270; Lyons, p. 163.
7. Boyd, 1991, p. 491.
8. D.B. Johnson, 1984.
9. Paradis, quoted in Beaujour, 1989, p. 219. See also J. Cummins, p. 85, and Malakoff and Hakuta, all in Bialystok.
10. Eichelberger.
11. Boyd, 1990, p. 245.
12. Naumann, 1991.
13. Boyd, 1990, p. 175.
14. Ibid., p. 268.
15. C. Brown, 1967.
16. Dryden, p. 18.
17. Clayton, p. 99.
18. George Steiner, 1975, p. 301; Robinson, p. 241.
19. Pound, 1968.
20. Boyd, 1991, p. 336.
21. Steiner, 1975, p. 308.
22. Gifford, pp. 11–12; Boyd, 1991, pp. 354–55.
23. Lewis, p. 62.
24. Gerschenkron.
25. Grayson, p. 61.
26. D. Nabokov, "Translating with Nabokov," p. 150.
27. Rosengrant, p. 96; Grayson, p. 176.
28. Boyd, 1990, pp. 428–29.
29. Schakovskoy, 1979, p. 25.
30. Lewis, p. 62.
31. Grayson, pp. 141ff.
32. Fitch, p. 119.
33. Ibid., pp. 119–120.
34. Derrida, in Graham (1985), p. 171.
35. Boyd, 1991, p. 649.
36. Ibid., p. 650.

TRANSPARENT THINGS

Transparent Things, written between 1969 and 1972, was the sixteenth of Nabokov's seventeen novels.[1] Its immediate predecessor, *Ada*, had been a long, luxuriant fantasy with an extravagantly gifted heroine and hero. *Transparent Things* offers a sharp contrast: a short, austere tale with a bumbling, inept, slightly absurd protagonist. Critics did not know what to make of the novella; nor did it catch the fancy of many readers.[2] Even John Updike, one of Nabokov's best readers, frankly stated his admiring incomprehension.[3] Updike's reaction was widely shared, and Nabokov undertook the (for him) unprecedented step of offering his readers some guidance in a 1972 interview where he blandly described the theme of *Transparent Things* as "merely a beyond-the-cypress inquiry into a tangle of random destinies" (*SO* 194–96). In the years since, the attention devoted to *Transparent Things* has come to exceed the length of the book itself as critics realized it contains the most nearly explicit formulation of several of Nabokov's fundamental themes.

Nabokov biographer and critic, Brian Boyd, who provides the best general introduction to the mysteries of *Transparent Things*, asserts that the novella explores: "the nature of time; the mystery and privacy of the human soul, and its simultaneous need to breach its solitude; the scope of consciousness beyond death; [and] the possibility of design in the universe."[4] Although Boyd is good on Nabokov's themes, the reader may well have trouble in perceiving how these themes are embedded within the novella's involute patterns. Michael Rosenblum examines *Transparent Things* as a case study in how to read Nabokov, while Alex de Jonge also offers some pertinent thoughts on pattern-making in the novel.[5] Simon Karlinsky explores the novel's Russian literary echoes and particularly its thematic relationship to the early Nabokov tale "The Return of Chorb."[6] Robert Alter sees the novel's theme as the conflict between death and art (or opacity and transparency) and proposes various intriguing subtexts.[7] David Rampton also finds the theme of art versus death as central, but senses that the aging author has perhaps come to question his own long-held affirmation of art as sufficient solace.[8] Art and death also stand at the center of Garret Stewart's interpretation: "Existential death seems at times in Nabokov not only a dead but a decomposed metaphor in the stylistics of closure." In a fruitful comparison with Samuel Beckett, for whom death is viciously intimidating, Stewart notes that for Nabokov "style tends to elide death into mere figure, all terminus merely a transposition of terms."[9] Paul Bruss argues that *Transparent Things* focuses on the tenuous and ultimately unknowable nature of reality. Those (like Hugh Person) who believe that there is an unambiguous, recoverable past (a single reality) inevitably fall victim to its fluid, unfixable nature. True artists (like Mr. R.) recognize "the essential arbitrariness of human experience"—both past and present.[10] Other worthwhile general surveys of *Transparent Things* have been made by Herbert Grabes, G.M. Hyde, Richard Patteson, and Lucy Maddox.[11] Two more

specialized readings are also of interest. W.W. Rowe has used *Transparent Things* as a primary text in his argument, derived from Boyd, that Nabokov's novels are populated by ghosts who watch over the affairs of their survivors.[12] The much-discussed question of the novel's narratorial voice has been examined by the Finnish scholar Pekka Tammi,[13] while British scholars Michael Long and Bob Grossmith have looked at specific literary allusions in *Transparent Things*.[14] A survey of reviews may be found in Page.[15]

The major events of *Transparent Things* take place, with growing intensity, from the 1950s through the late 1960s and center around four trips to Switzerland made by Hugh Person. On the first, Hugh, a college student, accompanies his newly widowed father who dies while trying on a pair of trousers in a shop. Hugh marks the occasion by losing his virginity to an Italian prostitute in a shabby rooming house. After some years, Hugh, a young man of some gifts but little artistic talent, becomes an editor for a New York publisher who assigns him to work with Mr. R., a brilliant, if perverse, novelist who lives in Switzerland. By chance, Hugh has had a one-night liaison with Mr. R's former stepdaughter, Julia Moore. Hugh's second Swiss trip is to meet with the much-married Mr. R. who is completing the first volume of a projected trilogy called *Tralatitions*. The novel apparently fictionalizes parts of the author's complex love life—in particular, his passion for his stepdaughter Julia. On Hugh's train journey to meet Mr. R. he falls into conversation with a young woman named Armande Chamar as she reads one of Mr. R.'s earlier novels which she has received from her friend Julia Moore. Hugh is so taken with Armande that his interview with the famous Mr. R. passes in a daze. Unathletic Hugh launches his tormented, awkward courtship of the coldly promiscuous Armande on the ski slopes of her native town. In spite of his own ineptness and her shallow character, the couple marry. Their Italian honeymoon is marred by Armande's insistence on a mock fire drill in which they must escape their room by climbing down the outside of their hotel. Back in New York, Hugh's blind adoration protects him from Armande's behavior during the brief months of their life together. Soon after a third trip to Switzerland, Hugh, who has been prone to nightmares and sleepwalking from childhood, strangles Armande during a dream in which he saves her from leaping from the window of a burning building. He is tried and sentenced for murder and spends several years being shuffled between prison and asylum. Released, Hugh, age forty, makes his last journey to Switzerland in a pilgrimage to recover the happiest moments of his life when he first knew Armande. He returns to the very hotel room where she first visited him before their marriage. As he dreams of her impending visit, the hotel is set afire by a disgruntled former employee, and Hugh, mistaking the door for the window, dies of smoke asphyxiation.

The plot of *Transparent Things*, as opposed to its simple story line, resembles a set of those nesting Russian dolls, while the identity and status of the narrator remain obscure. It is by means of this artful structural complexity

that Nabokov simultaneously conceals and reveals the metaphysical meaning of *Transparent Things*. The tale's mysterious narrator proves to be Mr. R., the German-born novelist who writes in a baroquely brilliant English, but whose spoken English is strewn with Germanisms and mangled English idioms. Mr.R., who dies in the course of the events narrated in *Transparent Things*, is, in fact, already dead at the beginning of his story (*SO* 195). The otherworldly status of Mr. R. (and several other characters) lends the semi-omniscient ghost narrator certain advantages not available to ordinary, living eyewitnesses. Among other things, he can sink into the past of any person or object in order to seek out the patterns that underlie the present. The most obvious example is Mr. R's inset tale of the pencil in chapter 3 which Nabokov described as "the clue to the whole story" (*SL* 506).

Death is at the center of *Transparent Things*. There are no fewer than sixteen deaths in the short book, although only three (Hugh's father's, Armande's, and Hugh's) occur "on stage." Mr. R., as narrator and ghost, uses his special powers to pinpoint those parts of the past that seem to preordain Hugh's fate. There are three linked complexes of lethal motifs that sketch Hugh's life and death: fire, falling, and asphyxiation.

Fire pervades the short novel. The first faint flicker comes when the Trux clothing store where Hugh's father shops is shorthanded because of a fire. The fire motif continues when Hugh takes Julia Moore to an avant-garde theater presentation, *Cunning Stunts*, which is disrupted by flaming streamers that threaten to set the place afire. Fire is also prominent in Mr. R.'s best novel, *Figures in a Golden Window*, which Armande is reading when Hugh first meets her. Its title perhaps reflects an incident in which the narrator's daughter, June, sets fire to her doll house and burns down the entire villa. This fictional conflagration is featured on the book cover done by the artist Paul Plam (cf. the Russian *plamia* "flame"). Recounting his meeting with Armande in his diary, Hugh tacitly alludes to Alfred de Musset's poem "À Julie" in which the impassioned poet decries his squandered life and proclaims that he will end in ashes like Hercules on his rock: "'tis by thee that I expire, / Open thy robe, Déjanire, /that I mount my funeral pyre" (28). The fire motif intensifies when the honeymooning Armande, having seen a TV newcast of a hotel fire, insists that acrophobic Hugh help her in her hazardous impromptu fire drill. These strands of the motif all come together in Hugh's nightmare in which he fatally "saves" Armande during a dreamed fire. Even Hugh's death in a hotel fire is foreshadowed when he is unable to reserve a room in another hotel because it is under repair following a fire.

Images of falling and burial beneath avalanches are scarcely less important than fire in making up *Transparent Things*' death theme. As a boy, acrophobic Hugh walks the roof of his residential school during his somnambulistic trances. His father's death is prefaced by a window blind which crashes down "in a rattling avalanche" (10). After the fatal heart attack, his body seems to have fallen from some great height. That night Hugh resists the pull of gravity

that attracts him to his hotel window. After nightmare-ridden Hugh strangles Armande, he is awakened by their fall, not from the flaming window of his dream, but from their bed. As Hugh himself dies, he is attempting to leap from his hotel window.

Sinister avalanches, both real and metaphoric, are a part of the "falling" motif. Many are connected with athletic Armande's love for skiing. One of her numerous lovers before and after her marriage lies under six feet of snow in Chute (French for "fall"), Colorado; she skis at Aval, Quebec and C*aval*ere, California. Hugh suffers from "avalanche" nightmares in which "he would find himself trying to stop . . . a trickle of grain or fine gravel from a rift in the texture of space and being hampered . . . by collapsing colossuses. He was finally blocked by masses of rubbish, and *that* was death" (60). At the rush of awakening, these "avalanches" turn into verbal torrents that imperil sanity. Mr. R., dying of his rotted liver, speaks of the pain barely held at bay "*behind* the wall of my flesh like the muffled thunder of a permanent avalanche which obliterates there, beyond me, all the structures of my imagination, all the landmarks of my conscious self" (83–84).

The "asphyxiation" complex which points towards Hugh's strangulation of Armande has three components: strangulation, hands, and necks. The earliest hint is the episode in which the dreaming Hugh bare-handed crushes the three-legged stool that serves as a night table in his college dorm (21). Much more explicit is the green statuette of a woman skier that Hugh admires in a souvenir shop window while his father is having his heart attack. The sculptor is the Jean Genet-like convict Armand Rave who has strangled his boyfriend's incestuous sister (13). As Hugh awakes from his lethal nightmare, "he stares at his bashful claws," and his prison psychiatrist later offers a disquisition on hands and strangulation (79–81). Just as hands are foregrounded throughout the narrative, necks are objects of special attention. The necks of both Armande and a blond receptionist are lovingly noted. The prison psychiatrist asks an outraged Hugh whether he ever bought excessively tight turtleneck sweaters for Armande. Hugh buys himself turtlenecks for his first date with Armande and once again dons a turtleneck when he tries to recreate their early days.

Like all Nabokov novels, *Transparent Things* abounds in literary allusions. Some are incidental but most pertain to key elements of the story. One of the more obvious is Shakespeare's *Othello* in which the Moor strangles his beloved Desdemona. (Hugh has been thinking of Julia Moore just prior to his lethal nightmare and blends her image with that of Armande and an Italian prostitute who acquires the Shakespearean dream-name Giulia Romeo.) In another such allusion, Monsieur Wilde, the stolid Swiss gentleman who calls Hugh's attention to a magazine article about a wife-murderer, evokes Oscar Wilde and his prison poem "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" with its lines "Some strangle with the hands of Lust, / Some with hands of Gold," and, especially, its refrain "Yet each man kills the thing he loves" (96–98). Popular culture also

provides sources for allusion. Hugh's future is foreshadowed in an early reference to his strong hands, likening them to those of the Boston strangler—one Albert DeSalva who strangled thirteen women between 1962 and 1964 before being committed to Boston State Hospital (16). Baron R.'s appearance is compared to that of the nonexistent actor Reubenson "who once played old gangsters in Florida-staged films" (30). The very real Edward G. Robinson, who provides the prototype for Mr. R.'s features, played such a role in John Huston's 1948 classic *Key Largo*.

Nabokov's next-to-last novel is uncharacteristically laconic. Its themes emerge most clearly only against the background of his *oeuvre* which displays a remarkable consistency over a sixty-year period. Memory is one of the great themes of twentieth-century modernism, and Nabokov has singled out Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* as one of the three greatest literary works of the century (*SO* 57). His own autobiography, *Speak, Memory*, is a sensuously and minutely textured recreation of his past. Obsessive preoccupation with the past is not, however, without its dangers.

Mr. R., the narrator of *Transparent Things*, remarks that Hugh Person is "prone to pilgrimages" (86), but denies the Proustian search for lost time as Hugh's motive (94). The motive is, he says, connected with spectral visitations (presumably dreams of Armande) that impel Hugh to return to Switzerland in an attempt to recreate the past: "The desideratum was a moment of contact with her essential image in exactly remembered surroundings," specifically that first wondrous and never-to-be-repeated kiss (95). For the most part, Hugh's attempts to recover that past are unsuccessful and, as we know, end in his death. Why is Hugh's effort a failure? Many of Nabokov's fictional heroes make pilgrimages to their past and almost all of them end badly. In the 1925 story "The Return of Chorb," the young bridegroom retraces each step of the honeymoon journey on which his wife died.[16] Like Hugh, he ends his relived journey in the same dismal hotel room where the couple spent their first night. Attempting to recreate the scene, he hires a prostitute to spend the chaste night with him only to receive an unexpected visit from his in-laws who do not yet know of their daughter's accidental death. Chorb's sacramental pilgrimage into the past ends in farcical disaster. *Mary*, Nabokov's first novel, also points to the hazards of reliving the past. When his hero, Ganin, a Russian exile in Berlin, learns that his first love, Mary, is coming to Berlin to join her odious husband, he loses himself in reliving their affair in memory. Ganin, however, is wiser than Chorb. Before the arrival of Mary's train, he realizes that the past cannot be regained and strikes out without seeing Mary.

Hugh, a "sentimental simpleton and somehow not a very *good* Person . . . merely a rather dear one" (48), has not learned the lesson of Chorb and Ganin. Hugh's failure to separate past and present is illustrated in a striking metaphor. Skiing, which looms large in *Transparent Things*, requires skimming along the surface. Hugh cannot learn what all novice ghosts must: if he breaks through the "thin veneer" of the now, he will "no longer be walking on

water but descending upright among staring fish" (2). A pilgrimage to the past in memory may occasion deep personal and aesthetic satisfaction; a pilgrimage as an attempt to relive the past leads only to disaster. Nabokov has underscored this point in his remark that the good novelist is "like all mortals, more fully at home on the surface of the present than in the ooze of the past" (*SO* 195).

If *Transparent Things*' first theme concerns the past, the second and third involve the future. During Hugh Person's seven years behind bars, he maintains an Album of Asylums and Jails in which a dying fellow asylum inmate makes the following entry: "It is generally assumed that if man were to establish the fact of survival after death, he would also solve, or be on the way to solving, the riddle of Being. Alas, the two problems do not necessarily overlap or blend" (93). In the world of *Transparent Things*, the first problem is solved. The story is narrated by the dead Mr. R., and Nabokov has remarked that Hugh is welcomed by a ghost or ghosts on the threshold of his novel (*SO* 196). In fact, the novel's dead seem to constitute a kind of committee that watches over Hugh. Mr. R. discourses on the powers and the limitations of the dead in chapters 1 and 24. Most obvious among their powers is their ominiscience concerning the past which can, however, lead to difficulties. The newly dead, novices, must learn to focus their powers of omniscience to avoid slipping off into irrelevancy as they often do in the course of the narration. (Such "unscheduled" narrative diversions are often surreptitiously indicated by enclosing parentheses.)

Hugh, of course, has access to his own past which he is vainly trying to understand and, in part, resurrect. The ghosts, who while alive have all had some connection with Hugh, have access to *all* of his past (as well as the present) and are trying to seek out those coincidences that have shaped the pattern of his life. Like Hugh, they are "harrowed by coincident symbols" (13). This sifting of the past for "coincident symbols" is prominent in chapter 5 where events clustered in threes herald the death of Hugh Person, Sr.[17] More generally, Mr. R. draws on the results of this ghostly pattern-seeking which he artistically weaves into his narrative through the recurrent motifs of fire, falling, and asphyxiation.

The limitations of ghosts are no less important than their powers. As Mr. R. says, "Direct interference in a person's life does not enter our scope of activity. . . ." (92). The most that ghosts can do is "to act as a breath of wind and to apply the lightest, the most indirect pressure such as *trying* to induce a dream that we *hope* our favorite will recall as prophetic if a likely event does actually happen" (92). These subtle influences are manifested in the narration by various typographic devices such as spectral use of parentheses. Slightly slanted italics may reflect the slight breath of ghostly wind inclining the character toward a given action. Quotation marks help Mr. R. avoid elucidating the inexplicable nature of "dream" and "reality" (92). Proofreader's dele signs also have their role (102), as do transposed letters and anagrams (75). All

these devices are most apropos for the story of Hugh Person, editor and practicing proofreader.

Those in the ghostly dimension suffer another important limitation. In spite of their ability to pick out portentous patterns in the past such as those making up the fire motif, they do not know the future. Note that Hugh does *not* die of fire but of asphyxiation. In the opening scene of *Transparent Things* the late Mr. R. denies the existence of any concrete and individual future. The individual's future is merely a figure of speech, for human destiny is not "a chain of predeterminate links" but "a hit-and-miss" affair (92). Some future events may have a higher probability than others but all remain "chimeric" until after their occurrence. Ghosts, like humans, cannot know the future.

This limitation on ghosts is the subject of the second part of the madman's entry in Hugh's diary: the riddle of Being.[18] The riddle of Being arises in many Nabokov novels. Its nature is somewhat unclear, but it entails the idea of a creator or author figure who stands above and beyond both the human and ghostly dimensions and creates the coincidences and patterns that define the lives of lesser beings. A human character may (or may not) recognize coincidence and emergent pattern in his own present and past life. Ghosts can recognize patterns in any life or object, but have miniscule influence on the living and no future knowledge. It is the omnipotent author figure of a yet more encompassing dimension who not only creates the patterns but shapes the future. The fictional author–creator/narrator/character relationship (Nabokov/Mr. R./Hugh Person) in which each enjoys the powers and limitations proper to his respective level of "reality" hints at the existence of a parallel series of relations in the non-fictional universe. Like many of Nabokov's works, *Transparent Things* provides a cryptically playful model of the author's metaphysical speculations.

We now come to our final question. What is distinctive about *Transparent Things* within the context of Nabokov's *oeuvre*? The title itself provides the key. Its immediate meaning is clear enough. Nabokov told Alfred Appel "Ghosts see our world as transparent, everything sinks so fast."[19] The very act of their directing attention to an object or person may lead to sinking into its history. Both physical and temporal boundaries become transparent and dissolve. Novices delight in looking at the hollow in a pillow through a person's forehead, brain, occipital bone, etc., or at the swirl of semi-digested food in Hugh's entrails (101–102). With equal ease, they may penetrate the endlessly branching past of an object such as the pencil Hugh finds in a drawer. This power, however, brings with it a problem. If perception is not to become a matter of infinite regression in which the very identity and persistence of objects are hopelessly lost, the novice must master the art of staying on the surface. He or she must master the art of retaining things in a constant focus at least until a given physical or temporal level of perception is exhausted and the observer consciously wills another level of perception.

For humans, ordinary existence depends upon fixed physical boundaries, solid surfaces, and ordered time. What gives *Transparent Things* its unique quality is the point of view of its dead narrator(s) for whom all things are transparent: from "the transparent soap of evasive matter" (10) to the "transparent ring of banded colors around a dead person or planet" (93). It is Hugh's "transparent shadow" or "umbral companion" that subliminally urges him to flee Witt before the fatal fire (98).

Still another dimension of meaning is connected with the "transparency theme." The title of Mr. R.'s trilogy, *Tralatitions* (which is at least in part autobiographical) means "figure of speech, trope, metaphor." The author indignantly refuses to change the title to something with more commercial appeal. There are, he says, two kinds of title: the "stuck on" kind typical of the worst best-sellers, and the other kind: the title that the book was born with, "the title that shone through the book like a watermark" (70). This alludes to the title trope of Nabokov's novel on page one: "Transparent things, through which the past shines." "Tralatitions" and its adjective form "tralaticious" are rare words but not quite so exotic as they look. "Tralatition" is merely the Latinate equivalent of the Greek "metaphor" of the same meaning. The Latin root *tralat-* is a participial stem from *transferre* "to transfer," to carry across" which, in turn, breaks down into *trans-* "through, across" and *ferre* "to bear." If "transparent" means "to appear or shine through," "tralaticious" means "carried through or across." It is also significant that "tralatitions" stems from the same source as "translation," another sort of boundary crossing.

What does all this have to do with the theme of Nabokov's ghost story? The very titles, *Transparent Things* and *Tralatitions*, offer a set of metaphors for the author's life-long speculative concern with the relationship between this world and a possible hereafter. *Transparent Things* is a novel about boundaries and, more important, about seeing through and passing through them. The first boundary is death. Although impervious to the living, it is transparent to the dead who have passed through it and welcome Hugh at the novel's end. The second, more abstract boundary is that between the ghostly dimension of Mr. R., the narrator, and the author–creator for whom there are no boundaries. For him, all space–time, even the future, is a "tralatition," "a figure of speech," but he is the Speaker.

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NOTES

1. Boyd, 1991, pp. 565, 587.
2. Ibid., p. 651.
3. Updike, 1972, p. 242.
4. Boyd, 1991, p. 601.
5. Rosenblum, pp. 219–32; De Jonge, pp. 69–71.

6. Karlinsky, 1973, pp. 44–45.
7. Alter, 1972, pp. 72–76.
8. Rampton, 1984, p. 172.
9. Garret Stewart, pp. 331, 332.
10. Paul Bruss, 1982, p. 296.
11. Grabes, 1977, pp. 96–105; Hyde, pp. 201–206; Patteson, "Nabokov's *Transparent Things*," pp. 103–12; Maddox, pp. 130–41.
12. W. Rowe, 1981, pp. 12–16.
13. Tammi, 1985, pp. 145–156.
14. Long, pp. 44–47; Grossmith, 1985, pp. 18–20.
15. Page, pp. 37–39, 227–233.
16. Karlinsky, 1973.
17. Rosenblum, pp. 223–227.
18. See Boyd, 1985, pp. 49–88; D. Johnson, *Worlds in Regression*, pp. 185–222; and Alexandrov, 1991.
19. Appel, 1974, p. 298.

UNCOLLECTED CRITICAL WRITINGS

Like most of Nabokov's *oeuvre,* his literary criticism is both bilingual and bicultural. It spans over fifty-five years and covers an impressive range of literary topics and genres. Only a small segment of his prolific critical output has been collected so far: some of his articles and reviews (mostly written after he came to the United States) were reprinted during his lifetime in *Strong Opinions* and *Nabokov's Congeries*, and three more volumes of his lectures on Russian and European literature have been brought out since his death (*Lectures on Russian Literature*; *Lectures on Literature*; *Lectures on Don Quixote*).[1]

Nabokov's first published essay, "Kembridzh" ("Cambridge"), appeared in *Rul'* (*The Rudder*), a Russian émigré newspaper published in Berlin in October of 1921. As was the case with several of his poems published earlier that year in the same newspaper, Nabokov signed the essay with his new pen-name, Sirin.[2] He did so mostly in order to distinguish himself from another Vladimir Nabokov, his father, who was one of the founders and editors of *Rul'*.

Written by a twenty-two-year-old, "Kembridzh" has touches of juvenilia. One obvious example is the all-too-stereotypical juxtaposition of the Russian and English "souls": "In [the latter's] soul there does not exist this inspired whirlpool, this beat, this glow and this dancing madness, this anger and tenderness that lead us into God knows what kinds of heavens and abysses. We have moments when our shoulders reach the clouds, seas are but knee-high, and our soul is soaring! To an Englishman this is incomprehensible."[3] But while often rather obvious in his contrasts, the young Nabokov is already anything but predictable when it comes to his choice of words and images. In

"Rupert Bruk," published in *Grani* (*Facets*) in 1922, Nabokov surprises one by suggesting that Rupert Brooke's poetry contains "radiant humidity" ("siiaiushchaia vlazhnost'").[4] In another review, written also in 1922, he describes a short conjunction as if it were an object or even a person: Kipling's "if," Nabokov informs us, is "solid, simple, and, I would say, down-to-earth" ("tverdoe, prostoe, ia skazal by—zhiteiskoe").[5]

Both "Kembridzh" and "Rupert Bruk" at times also display unexpectedly mature thinking. One can easily see, for example, the glimpses of the much later Nabokov in the poignant conclusion of the Cambridge essay, where the young exile finds himself reflecting on "the strange whims of fate . . . and how my best recollections are getting older with every passing day and how there is as yet nothing I can replace them with."[6] Nabokov tends to be even more philosophical in "Rupert Bruk," which is full of the writer's meditations on the nature of life, death, art, and also the "otherworldly"—a theme that, according to Véra Nabokov, was quietly present in all of her husband's writings.[7] Thus while praising Brooke for his "passionate, piercing, [and] head-spinning love" of life (220), Nabokov also credits the poet with the unparalleled capacity to use his "painstaking and creative sharp-sightedness ['s muchitel'noi i tvorcheskoi zorkost'iu']" to look into "the twilight of the otherworldly ['v sumrak potustoronnosti']" (216).

Nabokov's identification with Brooke, who died in his twenties, seems almost complete, especially when he talks about the Englishman's delight in the world around him: "At the moment of his death he would wish to conceal [the world] under his clothes and then, somewhere within the bounds above the sun ['v nadsolnechnom predele'], at leisure endlessly to study and touch his deathless treasure ['razgliadyvat' i shchupat' bez kontsa svoe netlennoe sokrovishche']" (220). Nabokov even summarizes Brooke's art in the same way in which he often wished people would summarize his—as a "passionate service to pure beauty" (231).

But "Rupert Bruk" is more than an essay on Brooke's and Nabokov's philosophical affinities. It is also an early showcase of Nabokov's art as a translator. These early translations of poetry are of course from English into Russian, yet they are not unlike Nabokov's rhymed translations of Pushkin, Lermontov and Tiutchev in the 1940s. The translations (eleven in all) are smooth and competent if not always totally accurate. As in his later translations in *Three Russian Poets*, Nabokov tries to preserve the rhyming pattern and, wherever possible, even the meter of the original, yet he also feels free to paraphrase the poet as long as the general sense of the poem remains largely intact.

Nabokov's admiration for Brooke as a poet underscores his taste for rather traditional poetry, which may be surprising in a writer whose own art is often associated with innovation and experimentation. By 1922, when Nabokov was introducing Brooke to the Russian émigré public, Brooke's poetry sounded almost anachronistic, especially when compared to that of T.S. Eliot, whose

Waste Land was published a year earlier. But Nabokov, who at the time he wrote the article still considered himself primarily a poet, was always significantly more conservative with poetry than he was with prose. Thus his own early poetic attempts were often viewed by other émigré critics as a case of "reject[ing] all [contemporary] currents and schools, and employ[ing] images which have long since faded and ceased to be symbols."[8] And in his numerous reviews of contemporary Russian poets (which constitute a major part of his critical output in the twenties and early thirties) Nabokov did, indeed, unabashedly praise poetry which displayed "pleasing old-fashionedness" and was "simple and understandable."[9]

He also strongly criticized many of the icons of modernist poetry, some of which he found to be "disgustingly pretentious ['otvratitel'no izyskann(aia)'] . . . with a slight apocalyptic mood ['s apokalipsicheskim nastroen'etsem']."[10] In a 1927 review, which uncannily anticipates Nabokov's resentment of what he considered the unwarranted success of *Doctor Zhivago* as it competed with his own *Lolita* for the number one spot on the best-seller lists thirty years later,[11] Nabokov accused Pasternak and his fans of mistaking linguistic awkwardness for deep thinking: "He does not know Russian all that well and is inept in expressing his thought. [It is this] and not the profoundness or complexity of the thought itself which explains why it is hard to understand many of his poems. Quite a few of his poems cause a reader to exclaim: 'What nonsense, really!' ['Ekaia, ei Bogu, chepukha!']."[12]

But the demands Nabokov placed on poetry were not quite as simplistic as a cursory reading of his reviews may suggest. He hated poetic clichés as much as he detested trendy experimentation. He was also bored with purely "evocative" poetry. "Storytelling ['fabula'] is as necessary in a poem as it is in a novel," he wrote in 1927 while reviewing several new anthologies. "Poems which possess no unity of imagery ['net edinstva obraza'], no . . . lyrical storytelling but merely a mood are as inconsequential and transient ['sluchainy i nedolgovechny'] as the mood itself."[13] He drew a line, however, when the "storytelling" was colored with what he called "the loathsome tint of social intent ['prenepriiatnyi grazhdanskii ottenok']."[14]

If that sounds very much like the Nabokov we all know, so do the majority of the other views he expressed in his youth. Nabokov's polemical ferocity and sarcasm (see, for example, his defense of Bunin in "Iv. Bunin," "Na krasnykh lapkakh," "O vosstavshikh angelakh"[15]), his disdain for "poshlost'" in literature (which he particularly associated with contemporary Soviet literature—see "Iubilei" and "Torzhestvo dobrodeteli"[16]), even his detestation of Freudianism (see "Chto vsiakii dolzhen znat'?"[17])—all were already present in his "Russian" period.

Nabokov's Russian criticism did not automatically cease upon his arrival in the United States.[18] Thus in the early forties he contributed several pieces to the émigré newspaper *Novoe russkoe slovo* published in New York, and in

1957 Nabokov's article on translating *Eugene Onegin* ("Zametki perevodchika") appeared in another émigré publication, the journal *Novyi zhurnal.*[19] But it was his early collaboration in *The New Republic* that set the tone for Nabokov's future development as a literary critic.

Several months after his arrival in the United States, Nabokov was introduced to Edmund Wilson, who asked him to review Serge Lifar's biography of Sergei Diaghilev for *The New Republic* (which Wilson guest-edited at the time). The review appeared in November of 1940 and was vintage Nabokov. Appearing to cherish the chance to deflate a man whom the West had come to idolize as the genius behind the immensely popular Ballets Russes Nabokov informs the public that "among the many names connected with the Russian Renaissance," Diaghilev was "not a creative genius" and thus deserves only "honorable mention." Not satisfied merely with that, and often guided by his strong disapproval of homosexuality (even though a number of his close relatives were homosexuals), Nabokov proceeds to cut Diaghilev down to size even further by describing him as a rude and pathetic man given to childish tantrums: "The habit he had of smashing crockery and hotel furniture when slightly annoyed was partly responsible, perhaps, for the foreign conception of the Russian ego as exported abroad. His morals were frankly abnormal. . . . He bullied his dancers, blandly betrayed his friends and vilely insulted women." Having finished with Diaghilev, Nabokov turns his sarcasm on the author of the biography: "The second part of the book is devoted to what the author considers to be Diaghilev's best find: Serge Lifar. . . . the 'intimate' details of the author's relations with Diaghilev . . . are revolting not merely in themselves, but also by reason of the clumsiness of Mr. Lifar's pen."[20]

Between November 1940 and August 1941, *The New Republic* published five more reviews by Nabokov. In these first English reviews Nabokov's critical voice is unfalteringly authoritative. "What is history?" he muses in "Mr. Masefield and Clio." "Dreams and dust. How many ways are there for a novelist of dealing with history? Only three. He can court the elusive Muse of verisimilitude . . . , he can frankly indulge in farce or satire . . . , and he can transcend all aspects of time . . . provided he has genius."[21] Together with the books on Russian or "nearly Russian" subjects—the Dukhobors, Shota Rustaveli, a historical novel set in Byzantium[22]—Nabokov was also entrusted with reviewing a book on Shakespeare.[23] This represented Edmund Wilson's vote of confidence that Nabokov was well-versed in both cultures. "I am amazed at the excellence of the book reviews he's been doing for me," Wilson wrote to a friend in 1941, "He is a brilliant fellow."[24]

During the same year Nabokov's essays and reviews also appeared in *The New York Sun*, *The New York Times Review of Books*,[25] and *The Russian Review*, where his article on Lermontov bore a strong resemblance to his earlier piece on Rupert Brooke. As in "Rupert Bruk," in "The Lermontov Mirage" Nabokov combined his personal reflections about the poet with translations of his poetry (this time, from Russian into English; the same translations were to

appear several years later in *Three Russian Poets*). Ironically, whereas "Rupert Bruk," written some twenty years earlier, was at times pleasingly precocious, the Lermontov piece is strangely juvenile. Placed in a journal which was read primarily by Russian specialists, the article treats its readers as if they have as little knowledge of Lermontov as most of the émigrés in Berlin did of Brooke. It also tends to be overly simplistic in its generalizations—at one point Nabokov even claims that "Women prefer [Lermontov] to Pushkin because of the pathos and loveliness of his personality, singing so urgently through his verse."[26] In 1941 Nabokov also published his essay "The Creative Writer," an earlier (and in some ways fuller) version of "The Art of Literature and Commonsense" which appeared in *Lectures on Literature* in 1980.[27]

Other critical writings of the forties include two articles on teaching Russian published in an alumnae magazine of Wellesley College where Nabokov began teaching in 1941. In "On Learning Russian" (1945), Nabokov confronted American students' fear of taking Russian by assuring them that they were, in fact, more capable of learning a foreign language than his former countrymen: "my pet theory is that English-speaking people are born linguists, most of whom, unfortunately, do not use their gift, while, on the other hand, Russians have no real aptitude for languages but brazenly pick them up under the false impression that all foreign tongues are simpler than Russian."[28] In "The Place of Russian Studies in the Curriculum," written three years later, Nabokov made his selling pitch even stronger by promising that "the study of Russian language and literature is a unique and exquisite experience holding in store for the careful student endless enjoyment together with a most precious widening of spiritual and intellectual horizons."[29]

While Nabokov's views on poetry had been the dominant feature of his Russian criticism, during his English period the emphasis shifted to translation. In "The Art of Translation," written for *The New Republic* in 1941, Nabokov criticized many translators for being both incompetent and overly protective of their audience's sensibilities: "in an early English translation of 'Anna Karenina' . . . Vronsky had asked Anna what was the matter with her. 'I am *beremenna*' (the translators' italics), replied Anna, making the foreign reader wonder what strange and awful Oriental disease that was; all because the translator thought that 'I am pregnant' might shock some pure soul."[30] Similarly, in "Cabbage Soup and Caviar" (1944), Nabokov accused Constance Garnett of being "conventional, dull, inexact," and ridiculed numerous other translators by singling out Bernard Guilbert Guerney's *Treasury of Russian Literature* as "the first Russian anthology ever . . . that does not affect one with the feeling of intense irritation produced by the omissions, the blunders, the flat, execrable English of more or less well-meaning hacks."[31]

But it was Nabokov's own translation of *Eugene Onegin* that dominated much of his critical writings in the decades to follow. While several of the relatively late articles on that topic have been reprinted in *Strong Opinions* and *Nabokov's Congeries* ("Pounding the Clavichord" [1964] and "Reply to My

Critics" [1966]), Nabokov's earlier article, published in *Partisan Review* in 1955, is probably even more noteworthy. Here Nabokov did not yet have to defend himself from numerous attacks and thus could deal with the subject of translating *Eugene Onegin* in a relatively calm fashion.[32]

In "Problems of Translation: 'Onegin' in English," Nabokov questioned the wisdom of "smooth" verse translations and suggested that "it is when the translator sets out to render the 'spirit'—not the textual sense—that he begins to traduce his author. The clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase."[33] This statement reads like a strong indictment of Nabokov's own earlier translations of English and Russian poetry, which had often been praised by reviewers for being "smooth" and "readable"[34]—the very same compliments which in 1955 would already send him "into spasms of helpless fury."[35]

Nabokov's remarkable development as a translator, from his 1922 "pretty" rendition of Brooke to the "clumsy" Pushkin of the late fifties, prompts the question whether over the same period of time one can also detect substantial changes in his tastes and views as a literary critic. In his lectures on literature, Nabokov liked to tell his students that "although we read with our minds, the seat of artistic delight is between the shoulder blades. . . . Let us worship the spine and its tingle" (*LL* 64). What "tingled" Nabokov's critical "spine" appears to have remained surprisingly unchangeable throughout the years.

The sole unquestionable idol of his early youth, Pushkin ("Only Pushkin was . . . for me above human criticism," Nabokov wrote of his Berlin days[36]), continued to dominate Nabokov's literary affections in his later life. Nabokov's tastes in poetry in general did not undergo any significant transformation and stayed relatively conservative. His 1969 reaction to Joseph Brodsky, for example, was quite consistent with the verdicts on "new" poetry that he had passed in his youth. Where others saw an astonishingly original talent, Nabokov detected mostly a disappointing break with the old-fashioned and "pure" poetic tradition—Brodsky's poems, he thought, were "flawed by incorrectly accented words, lack of verbal discipline and an overabundance of words in general" (*SL* 461).

The tone of Nabokov's critical writings likewise did not change much. In an obituary for Iuly Aikhenval'd, one of the most prominent Russian critics of the older generation, the twenty-nine-year-old Vladimir Nabokov noted that Aikhenval'd's "critical judgment was never partial and not always even sparing, but he had one quality that was distinctly rare: he was always careful not to offend."[37] Nabokov himself frequently lacked the same critical compassion. He had a special talent for devastating sarcasm and no qualms about unleashing it on poets, writers and translators who failed to produce the necessary "delight . . . between the shoulder blades" that he so craved as a reader. Unlike Aikhenval'd's, Nabokov's critical reviews—whether in Russian or in English—are rarely informative: he often dismisses authors and books before a reader can even form a semblance of a notion of what they are all about.

But it may not be totally appropriate to compare Nabokov to Aikhenval'd or other professional critics who strive to be impartial and objective. Writers-turned-critics are frequently much more judgmental and impatient with other people's work precisely because they are writers and thus have definite ideas about what they themselves would have done with the same topic or material. It only stands to reason that in the case of Vladimir Nabokov, a man of indisputably "strong opinions," these ideas would tend to be even more definite than most.

Galya Diment

NOTES

1. Although not available in translation, many of Nabokov's Russian reviews have been reprinted in Dolinin and Timenchik, pp. 337–405.
2. There was a certain evolution in Nabokov's pen-name: he signed the first poem published by *Rul'* "Vlad. Sirin" while "Kembridzh" and "Rupert Bruk" were both signed "Vl. Sirin." By 1924, however, he already settled on "V. Sirin," the variant used throughout the rest of the Berlin period.
3. "Kembridzh," p. 2. Unless otherwise specified, all translations from Russian are mine.
4. "Rupert Bruk," p. 213. Hereafter, all page references to this piece will be given parenthetically in the text.
5. "Sergei Krechetov," p. 11.
6. "Kembridzh," p. 2.
7. Véra Nabokov, in Nabokov, *Stikhi*, p. [3]. See also Alexandrov, 1991.
8. Quoted by Field, 1986, p. 79.
9. "Sergei Krechetov," p. 11.
10. "'Beatriche' V.L. Piotrovskogo," p. 4. Nabokov also found similar qualities in the prose of Remizov, of whom he was very critical—see "A. Remizov" and "*Sovremennye zapiski*. XXXVII."
11. See Boyd, 1991, pp. 370–73; Field, 1986, pp. 301–302.
12. "Dmitry Kobiakov . . . Evgeny Shakh," p. 4.
13. "Novye poety," p. 4.
14. Ibid. "Literature of social intent" was Nabokov's favorite translation for what Russians call "grazhdanstvo" or "grazhdanstvennost'" in literature. See, for example, *Strong Opinions*, where Nabokov states: "Nothing bores me more than political novels and the literature of social intent" (p. 3).
15. Reprinted in Dolinin and Timenchik, pp. 373–76; 381–83; 383–87.
16. Both articles have recently been reprinted in *Daugava* (Riga) 9 (1990): 118–22.
17. Reprinted in Dolinin and Timenchik, pp. 393–95.
18. Before he came to the United States, Nabokov also occasionally wrote criticism in French—see his "Les écrivains et l'époque," which appeared in *Le Mois* in 1931, and "Pouchkine ou le vrai et le vraisemblable," published by *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1937. The latter was translated into English by Dmitri Nabokov for *New York Review of Books* in 1988 as "Pushkin, or the Real and the Plausible."

19. By then (i.e., soon after the publication of *Lolita*) already known to millions of non-Russians as V. Nabokov and not V. Sirin, he nevertheless chose to sign his article in *Novyi zhurnal* as "Nabokov-Sirin," thus blending his Russian and English literary identities.
20. "Diaghilev and a Disciple," pp. 699–700.
21. "Mr. Masefield and Clio," p. 808.
22. "Homes for Dukhobors," "Crystal and Ruby," "Mr. Masefield and Clio."
23. "Mr. Williams' Shakespeare."
24. Quoted by Boyd, 1991, p. 18.
25. Nabokov's reviews in *The New York Sun* featured J. K. Rothenstein's *The Life and Death of Condor* and Arthur Bryant's *Pageant of England (1840–1940)*. For *The New York Times Book Review* Nabokov reviewed Hilaire Belloc's *The Silence of the Sea and Other Essays*, which he found, on the whole, "much too easy to write" ("Belloc Essays," p. 26).
26. "The Lermontov Mirage," p. 32. Needless to say, several Russian women whose views on the issue are actually known rather than surmised (Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova, for example) actually preferred Pushkin to Lermontov. Nabokov tended to lump all women together not only as unsophisticated readers but also as second-rate artists. "I . . . am prejudiced, in fact, against all women writers," Nabokov told Wilson in 1950 (*NWL* 241). This "prejudice" is quite evident in many of his Russian reviews where his attitude towards women poets and writers is often markedly dismissive. See, for example, "Zodchii," "Benedikt Dukel'sky," "Nina Snesareva-Kazakova," and "Raisa Blokh." He did, however, occasionally praise women—see, for example, "N. Berberova," Nabokov's review of Berberova's novel *Poslednie i pervye*.
27. For a comparison of "The Creative Writer" and "The Art of Literature and Commonsense," see Alexandrov, 1991, pp. 56–57.
28. "On Learning Russian," p. 191.
29. "The Place of Russian Studies in the Curriculum," p. 179.
30. "The Art of Translation," p. 160. Interestingly enough, here Nabokov does not yet insist that the proper translation of Tolstoy's title is not *Anna Karenina* but *Anna Karenin*.
31. "Cabbage Soup and Caviar," pp. 92, 93.
32. Two years later there also appeared a Russian article—"Zametki perevodchika" ("Notes of a Translator," in *Novyi zhurnal*)—which dealt with Nabokov's translation of *Eugene Onegin*. It mostly contained, however, a condensed and translated version of some of the commentaries which would appear in the published edition.
33. "Problems of Translation: 'Onegin' in English," p. 496.
34. See, for example, Toynbee, who characterized Nabokov's translations from the 1940s as "neat" (p. 119).
35. "Problems of Translation: 'Onegin' in English," p. 496.
36. "Pamiati I. V. Gessena," p. 2.
37. "Pamiati Iu. I. Aikhenval'da," p. 5.

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